

## **Regional Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration in Central Asia**

Almaty, Kazakhstan  
15-16 March 2011

### **Summary Report**



## Introduction

### *Background*

On 15-16 March 2011, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in cooperation with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) co-organized the *Regional Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration in Central Asia*. The conference was convened under the auspices of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, with financial support provided by the European Union (EU), the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration of the U.S. Department of State, IOM and UNHCR.

The Conference brought together more than 120 participants, including Ministers, Deputy Ministers and other senior level government officials from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Turkey, as well as representatives of regional and international organizations, civil society, academia and the diplomatic community.<sup>1</sup>

The objectives of the Regional Conference were to increase the understanding of the nature, scale and reasons for mixed migratory movements in Central Asia and the wider region, and to agree on the development of a comprehensive and cooperative regional strategy on how to address this phenomenon in a protection sensitive manner. Discussions evolved around three priority areas including: 1) establishment of protection sensitive entry systems, 2) stabilization of population movements through the integration and reintegration of refugees, returnees, labour migrants and marginalized groups and the provision of alternatives to irregular movements, and 3) establishment of legal migration alternatives.<sup>2</sup>

This meeting was the last in a series of five regional conferences<sup>3</sup> organized by UNHCR in cooperation with Governments and other key partners as part of a three year EU funded project to sensitize key stakeholders in different regions about the protection challenges of mixed movements and to promote UNHCR's 10-Point Plan of Action on Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration as a framework for the development of comprehensive and protection sensitive migration policies.<sup>4</sup> IOM, in

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<sup>1</sup> See the List of Participants, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/4d7a2cf49.html>.

<sup>2</sup> See Concept Note: Regional Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration in Central Asia, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 15-16 March 2011, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4d7a2cf49.html>.

<sup>3</sup> The previous conferences took place in Yemen (May 2008), Senegal (November 2008), Costa Rica (November 2009) and Tanzania (September 2010). Further information about the previous conferences is available at <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a16aac66.html>.

<sup>4</sup> See "Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration: A 10-Point Plan of Action," Revision 1, January 2007, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4742a30b4.html>. Further information on the implementation of

line with its commitment to the principle of upholding the human dignity and well-being of migrants embodied, inter alia, in its 2007 Strategic Focus,<sup>5</sup> co-organized the last four of these five conferences.

### *National Consultations*

Prior to the Regional Conference, national consultations and information meetings were held in all participating Central Asian countries in order to review the key themes and issues for discussion at the Regional Conference. The main objective of these preparatory meetings was to bring together a broad spectrum of government officials, representatives of civil society and regional and international organizations to enable them to share their views on the main conference themes from a national perspective with a view to allowing for more focused and substantive discussions at the conference itself. The outcomes of these meetings<sup>6</sup> further informed the conference background paper and its final agenda.

### *Conference outcomes*

The following sections of this report summarize discussions during the plenary and working group sessions.<sup>7</sup> They are structured along the themes of the seven working groups. Each section concludes with the recommendations on specific themes made by participants.

The Almaty Declaration which was adopted in the closing session of the conference is attached as an Annex.<sup>8</sup> It provides the broader framework within which the conference recommendations will be implemented.

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the 10-Point Plan of Action in various regions is available at <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a16aac66.html>.

<sup>5</sup> See "IOM's Strategic Focus," available at <http://www.iom.int/jahia/jahia/about-iom/lang/en>.

<sup>6</sup> See the outcomes of national consultations, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/4d7a2cf49.html>.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the plenary and working groups sessions, see the Conference Agenda, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/4d7a2cf49.html>.

<sup>8</sup> See Almaty Declaration, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/4d7a2cf49.html>.

## **Managing borders, ensuring national security while ensuring protection**

Participants at the Regional Conference emphasized the sovereign right of States to ensure national security and protect their territories. They drew attention to the particular challenges of border management in the region given the long and porous borders of Central Asian States. Participants expressed concern over growing irregular migration, trafficking in drugs and in persons, and international terrorism in the region. They highlighted the need to harmonize relevant legislation and to strengthen cooperation between law enforcement agencies across the wider region.<sup>9</sup> Lack of equipment and infrastructure at the border, as well as insufficient training and a shortage of skilled staff were noted as major shortcomings in efforts to enhance border management and respond to cross-border crime.

Participants noted that any efforts to address current challenges need to be undertaken in line with international standards and with respect for the rights of migrants and refugees as provided under international human rights and refugee law and principles. Participants called on States to shift focus from the current system of strict border controls to an 'integrated border management approach' balancing enhanced border security with respect for the rights of people on the move, including the right to seek asylum.

Participants further encouraged States and other concerned stakeholders to examine more closely the linkages between security and protection measures. The establishment of mechanisms for profiling of persons crossing the international borders does not only help to identify and address specific protection needs of those on the move. It can also facilitate the collation of information on the profile and intentions of all persons entering the territory of a given State thus helping to mitigate security threats and strengthen national security.

Throughout discussions it was observed that the establishment of effective reporting and referral mechanisms between border management officials and migration and asylum authorities can facilitate prompt exchange of information and ensure that persons who may be in need of international protection (asylum-seekers) are identified in a timely manner and referred to competent authorities. Joint trainings and seminars of border management officials and asylum and migration authorities would enhance their capacities and help to ensure that referral mechanisms function effectively. International organizations and other interested stakeholders with relevant experience could support border authorities to streamline elements of human rights education and refugee protection into relevant training curricula. Within the broader border management context, participants also suggested conducting specific trainings on conflict prevention mechanisms with a view to averting massive cross-border movements.

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<sup>9</sup> Wider region refers to the Central Asian States and neighboring countries that participated in the conference.

In terms of enhancing training and capacity building, participants identified a number of good practices across the region, including joint trainings for Tajik and Afghan border management officials conducted by IOM, the Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) project funded by the European Union or specialized courses and seminars provided by the OSCE Border Management Staff College.

### **Recommendations:**

- i. States are encouraged to uphold principles and standards embodied in relevant international treaties, such as the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, as well as relevant OSCE commitments relating to refugees and internally displaced persons. In line with the existing international migration and asylum management standards and principles, and based on available good practices, States are encouraged to shift focus from strict border controls to an ‘integrated border management approach.’
- ii. States are encouraged to establish profiling and referral mechanisms to identify asylum-seekers and people who may need specific assistance. Such mechanisms may also contribute to State efforts to address legitimate security concerns.
- iii. Regional cooperation on border management needs to be enhanced, including through the development of mechanisms for exchange of data and information on migration flows, as well as through joint capacity building initiatives and trainings for staff from border and migration services. International organizations with relevant expertise may provide assistance in incorporating human rights and refugee law education into relevant training curricula.
- iv. All relevant stakeholders are encouraged to conduct specific trainings on conflict prevention mechanisms, with a view to averting massive cross-border movements.
- v. Increased infrastructural capacity and support is necessary in order to enhance national border management initiatives with a view of facilitating orderly movement of persons.

### **Strengthening integration of refugees, stateless persons and minorities in host countries**

Countries in Central Asia and the wider region have considerable experience with integration of refugees, stateless persons and minorities. Participants noted that some of the core conditions for successful integration include the provision of

appropriate legal and social status, creation of opportunities to seek legal employment and become self-reliant, and provision of access to education, healthcare and other services.

Throughout the Conference, participants emphasized that integration is a key prerequisite to harmonious community relations. It can safeguard against unrest, tensions and conflict that are often the byproducts or results of marginalization of certain groups. It is also a key factor in reducing regional instability and tensions among States. It further ensures that the potential of refugees, stateless persons, migrants and minorities for the growth and development of host communities is fully realized to the benefit of all. The absence of integration prospects and means to develop sustainable livelihoods can fuel irregular population movements, which in turn create fertile ground for smuggling and trafficking in human beings and other crimes.

Participants at the Regional Conference drew attention to the fact that most asylum systems in the region focus primarily on refugee status determination, with less emphasis on the subsequent integration of refugees and effective realisation and enjoyment of their rights.

Participants drew attention to different good practices developed to integrate different categories of persons, including refugees and stateless persons. Even though statelessness remains a challenge in the Central Asian region, several examples of simplified naturalization procedures have led to a reduction of statelessness across the region. The naturalization of former Soviet Union citizens through legislative amendments in Kyrgyzstan, for example, enabled many vulnerable persons to gain citizenship. Social and legal integration of refugees who fled the civil war in Tajikistan, including granting citizenship to thousands of refugees by a single presidential decree in Turkmenistan were also among the commendable practices identified by participants at the Regional Conference.

Participants highlighted the need to establish and/or strengthen mechanisms for the documentation of asylum-seekers, refugees and stateless persons. Provision of adequate documentation was seen as a major prerequisite for the enjoyment of rights with respect to employment, housing, education and healthcare services. Freedom of movement and choice of place of residency was likewise seen as crucial for increasing prospects for integration into host communities. Participants also noted that community mobilization and opportunities for self-reliance of refugees and stateless persons should be enhanced with a view to enabling these persons and their families to access sustainable livelihoods and foster their ability to positively contribute to the economic and social development of host communities. Adoption of simplified naturalization procedures for refugees, in accordance with the provisions of the 1951 Convention, was highlighted as a particularly positive example of efforts to facilitate the legal integration of refugees.

Participants expressed concern over shortcomings in the statelessness status determination procedures and called on States to harmonize their national policies, introduce necessary legislative changes and enhance bilateral cooperation in this regard. Several participants referred to the findings and outcomes of the Regional Conference on Statelessness, convened in December 2009 in Ashgabat, and encouraged participating States and other stakeholders to follow-up on the recommendations of that meeting. States should likewise engage competent stakeholders in designing, regularly reviewing and implementing national action plans on the reduction and prevention of statelessness.

**Recommendations:**

- i. The establishment and strengthening of mechanisms for the documentation of asylum-seekers, refugees and stateless persons is an important first step towards creating prospects for their integration in host countries.
- ii. States and other stakeholders are encouraged to develop and implement programmes aimed at facilitating the access of refugees and stateless persons to legal employment opportunities, housing, medical services and education. Freedom of movement is likewise crucial for integration of persons of concern.
- iii. All stakeholders are encouraged to support and strengthen community mobilization and self-reliance of refugees and stateless persons with a view of enabling them and their families to secure livelihoods for themselves and contribute to the development of host communities.
- iv. States are encouraged to incorporate provisions allowing for local integration of refugees into their national legal frameworks.
- v. In line with the provisions of the 1951 Convention, States in the region are encouraged to adopt simplified and accelerated naturalization procedures for refugees, so as to facilitate local integration and apply a comprehensive and strategic approach in light of available durable solutions.
- vi. States are encouraged to strengthen their cooperation in the realm of statelessness status determination procedures and to consider legislative changes to their legal frameworks on citizenship/statelessness where necessary.
- vii. In cooperation with other concerned stakeholders, States should adopt, regularly review and implement national action plans on the reduction and prevention of statelessness. The outcomes and follow-up to the

Regional Conference on Statelessness, convened in Ashgabat in December 2009, can provide useful guidance in this regard.

### **Strengthening reintegration of returnees and returning migrants in countries of origin**

Several countries of the Central Asian region have considerable experience with the reintegration of returning refugees (returnees) and returning migrant workers which could be shared and replicated elsewhere. Reintegration is not only important for the individuals themselves, but also for preventing irregular onward movements.

Participants agreed that lack of documentation, inability to exercise property rights and insufficient access to basic services, including medical care, housing and education were among the major obstacles to reintegration. Many persons including exploited labour migrants or victims of trafficking suffered serious psychological harm and trauma during their journey to or stay in another country. There is a need for more professional psychological counseling and rehabilitation services for affected persons and their families. Access to medical care, including free medical check ups for transmittable diseases, such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS is crucial not only with respect to realizing the basic rights of returning persons, but also to safeguard public health through effective prevention and management of transmittable diseases.

Participants highlighted the positive contribution that returning migrants and refugees can make to their countries of origin. They stressed the need to establish mechanisms and channels enabling returned persons to realize their potential to the fullest extent possible, including through the utilization of their working experiences, skills acquired abroad and financial investment. States, civil society and other actors were encouraged to explore new approaches to help returning migrants and refugees to effectively manage their savings, access investment opportunities and use their skills. Participants suggested to establish specialized centers where returning migrants and returnees could be provided with information and training.

#### **Recommendations:**

- i. States are strongly encouraged to develop and implement comprehensive national policies on reintegration of returnees. Such policies have to address different aspects of life upon return to the country of origin, including access to healthcare, housing, education and income generating programmes and activities.
- ii. To better utilize the (newly acquired) skills and/or optimize the financial investment potential of returning migrants and refugees, States and other stakeholders could consider developing programmes aimed at provision

of specialized (vocational) trainings as well as micro-credit schemes and other banking products and financial services encouraging migrant savings and investment.

- iii. States could consider establishment of specialized centers for returning migrants and refugees. These centers would be entrusted with providing information and counseling in the areas of education, healthcare, welfare systems, business development investment and employment.
- iv. To facilitate the prompt reintegration of returned persons and to ensure the realization and enjoyment of basic rights and access to services, States could simplify and expedite existing procedures for restoration of documentation and exercise of property rights.
- v. Recognizing the particular vulnerability of returnees, States and other concerned stakeholders are encouraged to provide facilities for addressing psycho-social problems of returnees, with particular attention to women and children.
- vi. States are encouraged to facilitate access to voluntary, confidential and free-of-charge medical check-ups.

### **Preventing trafficking and protecting the victims – with specific attention to child trafficking**

Participants acknowledged that trafficking in human beings is increasing in the wider region and discussed how the current anti-trafficking initiatives of state and non-state actors can be further strengthened. The absence of effective prevention measures, as well as shortcomings in the practical implementation of mechanisms aimed at the identification of victims and provision of adequate assistance to them, were noted as major challenges. Participants called upon States to enhance cooperation with other States and with civil society, in particular in the areas of awareness-raising, identification and provision of assistance to victims and prosecution of offenders.

Identification of trafficked persons was seen as particularly challenging in the context of mixed movements. Participants noted that mechanisms for adequate and effective identification of victims of trafficking are crucial for ensuring their protection and referral to appropriate assistance channels, and for the prosecution of traffickers. Moreover, failure to identify victims may lead to their criminalization, detention, deportation and re-victimization. Increased capacity building and targeted training of law enforcement officials were seen as important measures. Enhanced awareness-raising and active engagement of employers and labour inspectors could further help to identify cases of trafficking and labour exploitation. It was suggested that revision of relevant labour legislation could allow labour

inspectors to conduct unannounced and ad-hoc visits to places where potential victims of trafficking or of forced labour may be held.

Participants emphasized the need to pay specific attention to the identification of trafficked children. Unaccompanied, separated and migrant children were singled out as most at risk. Strengthened care and protection mechanisms for all children were suggested as important prevention measures. In this regard, the lack of access of some migrant children to education, especially those whose parents work as seasonal workers, as well as the low capacity of teachers, were identified as major challenges. Participants underlined the need to ensure that all actors likely to encounter trafficked children, in particular teachers and medical personnel, are trained and aware of their roles and responsibilities, and are actively engaged in strategies aimed at identification and prevention of trafficking.

Participants further explored ways in which coordination between relevant stakeholders, including across the borders, could be enhanced in order to ensure the referral of trafficked persons to the most appropriate follow-up procedures. They recommended that particular emphasis is placed on establishing procedures aimed at identification of trafficked persons who may be in need of international protection and their referral to competent asylum authorities. States were encouraged to consider and replicate best practices on granting refugee status to trafficked persons fearing persecution in their countries of origin, including for reasons relating to their trafficking experience. Likewise, referral mechanisms would be necessary to ensure that asylum-seekers whose asylum applications have been rejected but who need protection and assistance because they have been trafficked, are referred to competent authorities.

Participants repeatedly underlined the important role played by civil society and its active contribution to the provision of protection and assistance to victims of trafficking. It was noted that local non-governmental organizations perform a variety of protection and assistance related functions, including through the operation of shelters and hotlines and provision of psychological and legal assistance to victims. Participants appealed to States to enhance their cooperation with civil society actors, and to extend all necessary support in order to empower them to exercise their functions effectively. Establishment of outreach services and hotlines were noted as particularly important tools for establishing contact with potential victims and for empowering them to seek redress and protection from trafficking and exploitation.

In addition, States were also encouraged to enhance cooperation among each other and with international organizations, in particular in the area of prosecution of traffickers. To enhance their capacities to investigate and prosecute trafficking-related crimes, States were encouraged to consider employing the assistance of Interpol and other entities with specialized expertise in the process of investigation and prosecution of perpetrators.

Participants further noted that increased transnational cooperation and coordination are essential elements of effective trafficking prevention strategies. Joint capacity building initiatives and coordinated information and awareness raising campaigns can be important tools to harmonize and strengthen anti-trafficking prevention efforts.

**Recommendations:**

- i. States and other stakeholders are encouraged to promote full and effective implementation of international standards on combating trafficking and providing protection and assistance to victims.
- ii. All stakeholders are encouraged to strengthen capacity building efforts targeting national law enforcement officials, in particular in the area of identification of victims of trafficking. Labour inspectors should be engaged in joint efforts to identify cases of trafficking and labour exploitation. States are encouraged to consider introducing amendments to applicable labour legislation, so as to allow labour inspectors to conduct unannounced and ad-hoc visits.
- iii. Professionals likely to encounter potential victims of trafficking or exploitation, such as teachers or medical personnel, should receive adequate training and be actively engaged in efforts and strategies aimed at the identification of victims and prevention of trafficking.
- iv. States could consider inviting Interpol and other entities with specialized expertise to provide advice and participate in trafficking investigations including the prosecution of perpetrators.
- v. States are encouraged to establish, in cooperation with other stakeholders, mechanisms for the identification of trafficked persons who may be in need of international protection and for their referral to competent asylum authorities. In this regard, States are invited to replicate best practices on granting refugee status to victims of trafficking fearing persecution upon return to their countries of origin.
- vi. States are likewise encouraged to ensure that rejected asylum seekers who have been trafficked are referred to appropriate support mechanisms.
- vii. States are encouraged to take measures to improve the integration prospects of refugees as one of the key components of their strategies aimed at prevention of human trafficking.
- viii. All stakeholders should jointly develop awareness-raising strategies and invest in capacity building of organizations active in the fields of asylum and anti-trafficking.

- ix. States are encouraged to seek and implement safe solutions for victims of trafficking, based on the best interest determination and individual case assessment.
- x. States should ensure that all children on the move, regardless of their status, receive immediate and unconditional assistance and enjoy access to education. Specific attention should be paid to guaranteeing access to education for children of seasonal labour migrants.
- xi. Strengthened child protection mechanisms are an important component of any effective strategy to prevent trafficking in human beings. States are encouraged to enhance care and protection measures for all children, and in particular the most vulnerable ones, such as undocumented, unaccompanied, separated or asylum-seeking children and children of migrant workers.
- xii. All stakeholders are encouraged to jointly establish a unified anti-trafficking hotline for the Central Asian region.

### **Developing legal migration opportunities and gender-sensitive migration policies**

Growing irregular migration constitutes a serious challenge for States and exposes migrants to considerable risks, including exploitation, abuse, human trafficking and smuggling. Enhanced legal migration opportunities can play an important role in addressing irregular migration. Greater opportunities to move legally reduce the tendency of individuals to resort to irregular channels and employ the services of smugglers. Efforts to expand the channels for legal entry and stay can include, for example, temporary or circular labour migration programmes including bilateral labour agreements, family reunification measures, study options and regularization programmes.

Conference participants noted that migration was inevitable as long as there was a demand for labour in countries of destination and push factors, such as poor economic and social conditions or political instability, in countries of origin compelled people to move. They acknowledged a growth in irregular migration in the wider region and stressed the need to respond through creating or expanding legal migration opportunities. The importance of recognizing the benefits of legal labour migration was emphasized on several occasions. Participants noted that it has the potential to serve as an engine for growth and development in countries of origin and destination and a means to economic betterment for labour migrants and their families. Enhanced legal migration channels help to reduce unemployment and provide survival means for family members remaining in countries of origin and can contribute to strengthening the workforce and meeting labour market demands in countries of destination. By being able to access legal migration channels, labour

migrants are better protected from abuse, exploitation or the risk of falling victim to traffickers.

Participants encouraged States to establish or strengthen existing national, bilateral and regional legal migration frameworks. In terms of national frameworks, participants pointed out that the lack of migration statistics and insufficient data sharing among various agencies at national level pose obstacles to the development of adequate migration policies. In order to address particular challenges related to the growing feminization of migration, participants emphasized the need to properly incorporate gender sensitive provisions into migration laws, policies and programmes, and to conduct gender impact assessments whenever new policies are developed and laws adopted in order to establish whether they have different impact on men and women. The protection and assistance needs of asylum-seekers and refugees need to be properly reflected in all migration strategies and policies.

Participants highlighted the importance of developing and implementing bilateral and/or multilateral agreements with neighboring countries, as well as those countries that are likely to attract labour migration. In terms of bilateral cooperation it was observed that migration policies in countries of origin and destination need to be harmonized and complemented by labour market analysis enabling to match labour supply with the needs of the labour markets in countries of destination. Reference was also made to a number of regional mechanisms and instruments on legal migration, such as the CIS Convention on Legal Status of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. States were likewise encouraged to ratify and implement international instruments relating to protection of migrants, such as the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, or ILO Conventions No.97 and No.143. Participants regretted that migration discussions on bilateral and regional levels are often too theoretical and based on political and national security considerations rather than on legal expertise and practice. When drafting bilateral and multilateral agreements on migration, it was recommended that a less declarative and more pragmatic approach be adopted.

Participants stressed the need to assist migrants at all stages of the migration cycle, including pre-departure and return. States were encouraged to consider launching gender-sensitive information and awareness-raising campaigns regarding, for example, employment and professional and educational requirements abroad, as well as rights and obligations of migrants in countries of destination. These information campaigns should be targeted to specific groups and coordinated between countries of origin and destination. Active involvement of civil actors, such as the Private Recruitment Agencies (PRAs), in facilitating organized legal migration abroad was noted as particularly important. States were encouraged to develop legal frameworks and establish clear procedures for registration, licensing and regulation of PRAs, in order to create conditions conducive to their effective operation.

Participants observed that even migrants who enter a country legally may find themselves in an irregular situation if they end up overstaying. Some participants proposed to apply a diversified approach to different categories of migrants, depending on their qualifications, skills and domestic labour market needs. Simplified procedures for issuing work permits to highly skilled labour migrants, as well as patent system aimed at legalization of low skilled workers (particularly domestic workers), were noted as efficient regularization tools.

Participants stressed the need to address any negative impacts of migration on family life in countries of origin, including with respect to the situation of separated families or children being brought up without parents. In parallel, in the context of increasing feminization of migration, a growing tendency was noted of migrant workers moving with their entire families. This creates the need to provide appropriate services to diverse migrant groups, including women and children, such as for example adequate health and social welfare conditions or education for migrant children.

### **Recommendations:**

- i. States are encouraged to strengthen legal migration channels and mechanisms at national, bilateral and regional levels. Bilateral and multilateral agreements are one way of providing for legal and orderly migration. However, more generally, permanent and temporary migrant admission schemes should be pragmatic and reflect the particular context in which migration takes place.
- ii. States are encouraged to take all necessary measures to reduce irregular migration, combat human trafficking and smuggling and take a human rights approach in protecting all persons on the move, including migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees.
- iii. States are encouraged to conduct regional labour market assessments in both countries of origin and destination, to be used as the basis for the development of more targeted migration programs that match labour market demand and supply.
- iv. The role of civil society actors in providing services to migrants and conducting information and awareness-raising campaigns should be strengthened. Private recruitment agencies should be engaged in developing circular migration programmes that provide opportunities for all to participate on the basis of equality.
- v. States are encouraged to design or strengthen mechanisms for gender-disaggregated data collection, as a pre-requisite for developing gender-sensitive migration policies. Gender expertise and gender mainstreaming should be made an integral part of migration policy analyses,

development and implementation to ensure more gender just policies and programmes.

### **Reinforcing partnerships**

The need for strong partnerships and enhanced cooperation and coordination was echoed by all. Participants emphasized that inter-institutional and inter-state collaboration and coordination needs to be strengthened at national, bilateral, regional and international levels in order to address the multilayered challenges of asylum and migration management.

At the national level, participants noted certain shortcomings in the area of cooperation and coordination on migration issues among different government institutions and called for greater cross-sectoral cooperation. They further emphasized the need to involve stakeholders such as social and employment agencies, trade unions, civil society actors, representatives of the private sector and migrant communities. National authorities were also encouraged to strengthen dialogue with regional and local authorities to increase their capacity to react to emergency situations. In return, national authorities can benefit from information gathered by local authorities to design well informed strategies. Participants also proposed to include migrants and refugees, as well as representatives of receiving communities in debates relating to resolution of specific problems.

Participants observed that bilateral cooperation in the context of migration should focus on partnerships between neighboring countries, and between sending and receiving countries.

Participants noted that in the wider region, a number of regional and international organizations are active in the field of migration management. They agreed on the importance of better coordination of different activities by organizations with similar mandates and fields of operations, as well as enhanced cooperation within existing regional frameworks. Established thematic working groups should be operationalized through capacity building initiatives and more effective use of the opportunities for dialogue they provide. Enhanced cooperation and coordination of activities among regional forums could further strengthen regional dialogue, contribute to information exchange and sharing of good practices and expertise, which would in turn allow for more targeted assistance. Cooperation between States and international organizations should be carried out at the highest level and to the fullest extent possible to allow for the effective implementation of international standards and good practices.

Participants identified several critical areas for cooperation, one of them is data collection and exchange. States and international and regional organizations were encouraged to develop common standards for the collection, analysis and exchange of data on mixed migratory movements. Another area that requires enhanced cooperation are information strategies to inform people of the risks associated with

irregular migration, and the availability of legal migration and employment opportunities.

**Recommendations:**

- i. States are encouraged to strengthen cooperation and coordination between all relevant government institutions, including but not restricted to those dealing with different aspects of refugee protection and migration management. Other interested stakeholders, such as civil society actors, trade unions, employment agencies and representatives of private sectors and academia should also be included in discussions.
- ii. National-level institutions are encouraged to strengthen and expand their interactions with regional and local bodies through enhancing their capacity to act on migration related issues and to react to emergency situations.
- iii. Refugee and migrant communities should be empowered to participate in migration debates and decision making processes that have an impact on their lives and future.
- iv. Enhanced cooperation on migration related issues should be pursued at bilateral level, in particular between neighboring countries and between countries of origin and destination.
- v. Existing regional mechanisms and frameworks could be better utilized to facilitate dialogue on cross-cutting issues related to asylum and migration, in particular through enhancing the capacity of already established thematic working groups, such as those created within the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Eurasian Economic Community or other regional organizations. Cooperation at regional level could also be strengthened by expanding the content and geographical scope of ongoing projects.
- vi. Initiatives and activities undertaken by various international and regional organizations active in the field of mixed migration should be better coordinated and harmonized to avoid duplication and maximize impact.
- vii. Strengthened cooperation among all stakeholders is required in particular in the field of data collection and exchange. Regional and international organizations are encouraged to work with States in developing common standards and criteria for the collection, analysis and exchange of data on mixed migratory movements.

- viii. National consultations, convened in some countries in preparation for the Regional Conference, can serve as useful platforms for further discussion of the conference recommendations and follow-up at national level.
- ix. States in the wider region could consider the establishment of a regional Task Force on Mixed Migration, with the participation of all relevant stakeholders, including the countries of origin, transit and destination, international organizations and civil society. Such a regional body could be tasked, inter alia, with the follow-up and implementation of the outcomes of the Regional Conference at regional level.

### **Developing information and awareness-raising strategies**

Developing targeted information and awareness-raising campaigns is an important component of any strategy to address mixed movements. The content and objectives of such campaigns would differ depending on specific situations and target groups. Comprehensive information campaigns on the general situation, employment opportunities, integration prospects and assistance available in countries of destination can enable potential migrants to make informed decisions on whether to migrate or not. Targeted awareness-raising initiatives alerting people about the dangers of irregular movement or the specific practices of criminal organizations can also contribute to diminishing the risk of persons falling victims to trafficking networks, abuse and exploitation.

Participants agreed that many migrants and asylum seekers find themselves in situations of vulnerability and risk of abuse or exploitation due to their lack of knowledge of applicable legislation, including both their rights and responsibilities in host countries. It was suggested to explore ways on how these information gaps could be filled.

To increase the effectiveness of awareness-raising initiatives, participants emphasized the need to involve all relevant stakeholders, including governments, civil society actors, representatives of religious and community institutions, as well as refugees and migrants in disseminating and sharing necessary information. They also highlighted the potential of information campaigns in countering racism, xenophobia or any negative public perceptions of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrant workers, therefore promoting tolerance and harmonious community relations.

### **Recommendations:**

- i. States and other stakeholders are encouraged to undertake comprehensive information campaigns aimed at the promotion and protection of the rights of migrant workers, asylum-seekers and refugees.

- ii. Such information campaigns should include updated information on the situation, employment and integration opportunities and rights and obligations in countries of destination, as well as on potential dangers associated with irregular migration.
- iii. To increase the effectiveness of awareness-raising initiatives, all relevant actors, including government entities, civil society, representatives of religious and community institutions, as well as refugees and migrants should be involved in information dissemination efforts.
- iv. States and other competent stakeholders should support the establishment and operation of hot line services aimed at the provision of prompt and updated information and assistance to migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees.
- v. All concerned stakeholders are encouraged to invest in capacity building, education programmes and other trainings of government officials, mass media and community leaders on issues related to mixed migration.
- vi. All stakeholders should jointly strengthen their efforts to promote tolerance and take all necessary measures to combat racism, exclusion and xenophobia against migrant workers, asylum-seekers and refugees, for example through awareness-raising campaigns or specialized educational programmes.