

Towards a world without forced migration: 19 key demands from migrant groups in Asia Pacific

Friday 23 April 2021, by [Regional Migrants' Agenda](#) (Date first published: 1 April 2021).

What is needed for a world without forced migration? This is the question that migrant groups from across the Asia-Pacific region have asked and presented on during a recent review of the UN's Global Compact on Migration (GCM).

In this month's "Voices from the South," we present the "Regional Migrants Agenda" - an advocacy tool that reflects 19 issues, demands and ways forward for migrants' rights. The tool has been used by migrant groups across the region (including the coordinator of the initiative - the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants) during their engagement with respective governments and with the UN's migration processes. As of April 2021, over 100 organizations have endorsed the document.

Regional Migrants' Agenda

(This is an edited and abridged version. The original text can be found [here](#). The original version is now endorsed by over 100 organizations in the region.)

The **Regional Migrants' Agenda** reflects the issues, aspirations and demands of migrants and their families in and from Asia Pacific.

Unemployment and economic insecurity, exploitation, racism, discrimination and stigmatization, and government neglect are among the many urgent issues confronting migrants and their families especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to demands and recommendations to address these concerns, we also challenge governments to acknowledge the failure of the neoliberal mantra of managing migration for development. There is a need for them to recognize that the drivers of migration - poverty, unemployment, landlessness, climate injustice, among many others - are caused and have been made worse by neoliberal policies imposed on economies and people for a very long time.

There is a need to veer away from a remittance-dependent economy and pursue instead a sustainable economic pathway that is based on human rights and justice, independent from foreign intervention or control, and people-centered. As all governments tread this more progressive path, migrant-sending country governments should set standards for the protection of their nationals working and living overseas, incorporate these demands in existing bilateral agreements, if any, and demand receiving countries to recognize and uphold them.

As we acknowledge the importance of the [GCM process](#) in addressing problems that we are confronted with, we will continue to wage ground-level campaigns and struggles aimed to champion the rights, welfare and dignity of migrants and their families in the short-term and in the long term,

pursue a migration that is actually a choice, based on human rights, and all actors have accountability.

“We will continue to wage ground-level campaigns and struggles aimed to champion the rights, welfare and dignity of migrants and their families in the short-term and in the long term, pursue a migration that is actually a choice, based on human rights, and all actors have accountability.”

- Regional Migrants Agenda

Here are our 19 demands:

LABOR, IMMIGRATION AND RACISM

1. Develop labor law, including amending existing ones, that will protect workers' rights and include immigrants and temporary migrant workers.

This especially includes migrant domestic workers, caregivers, fishermen, agricultural workers, seasonal workers and those in the informal sector.

- Implement policies that will safeguard migrants from overwork, exploitation and being placed in inhumane living and working conditions.
- Recognize labor trafficking as trafficking and craft policies to protect workers, especially migrants, from it.
- Strengthen or introduce legislation upholding rights of migrant workers to free association, to form or join unions, and exercise their workers' rights.
- Particularly for Korea, change the employment permit system to the worker permit system.

2. Recognize domestic work as work.

Acknowledge that migrant domestic workers are workers, not servants or slaves, and ensure their protection from exploitation, overwork and abuse.

3. Repeal visa regimes that are oppressive, discriminatory and put migrants in vulnerable conditions.

Lower exorbitant visa fees and exempt migrants from payment of such especially during times of crisis.

4. Enhance protection for migrants against abuses of recruitment agencies and intermediaries through:

Through: (a) legislation and enforcement of stronger policies, including amendment of existing ones, in both migrant-sending and -receiving countries that contain punitive provisions for erring institutions; and (b) capping or abolition of recruitment fees that migrants are subject to pay to both government and private institutions.

5. Step away from national security approach to migration and migrants as non-citizens.

Introduce policy that eliminates racism and discrimination, protects the rights of migrants and provides them with equal access to services.

- Review immigration policies that make migrant workers vulnerable. Commit to ensuring non-

discrimination and providing more information and services for undocumented migrants, especially children.

- In particular, for the Gulf Cooperation Council, repeal the Kafala system.

6. Eliminate mandatory medical-testing among migrant workers.

Repeal policy discriminating migrant workers with HIV. Review health policies and remove cost discrimination for migrants in health sector and enhance access for all migrants to health services.

7. Uphold the rights of migrant workers to free expression, speech and assembly.

Repeal state policies and mechanisms that violate these rights of migrants and put their lives at risk. In particular, challenge and repeal the ongoing policy of the Philippine government to terror-tag migrants and migrant organizations, especially those vocal in their criticism of the current government's activities.

MARRIAGE MIGRANTS

8. Strengthen immigration policy that will facilitate smooth integration of immigrants, especially marriage migrants and their children, in countries of their respective spouses/partners.

9. Enhance policies for protection of migrants with spouse visas or its variation, especially women, against any and all forms of domestic and family violence

Develop accessible and comprehensible safe spaces for migrant women in distress.

10. For migrant-sending countries, **provide safeguards to protect their nationals**, especially women marriage migrants, from bogus marriages that make them vulnerable to sex trade and/or slave labor.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

11. Ensure protection for international students from education trafficking, which is the entrapment of international students through deception, coercion and exploitation by private agencies.

This including recruitment agencies, private education institutions and businesses.

CLIMATE MIGRANTS

12. Strengthen governance and policymaking around protection of climate-induced migrants and displaced peoples.

Introduce and implement protocols and policies to protect them, specifically indigenous peoples, migrants, women and children.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

13. For migrant-sending country governments:

- Ensure free repatriation of migrants and expand assistance upon arrival in the origin countries, including free mass-testing for COVID-19, free accommodation, free access to health service and free transport to their place of origin.

- Improve services and support from embassies, consulates and missions of sending-country governments for their nationals living and working overseas.
- Particularly, for Bangladesh, Immediately and unconditionally release returned migrants wrongfully incarcerated by state authorities.

14. For migrant-receiving country governments:

- Provide access to free health services and accommodations for migrant workers in between jobs in host countries.
- Make sure accommodation is according to the minimum standards, not crowded, have proper ventilation, electricity, clean water etc. People should have space to maintain distance from each other.
- Facilitate flexible and efficient visa processing to mitigate vulnerability and insecurity of migrants arising from restrictions in mobility

15. For both migrant-sending and migrant-receiving country governments:

- Provide Personal Protective Equipment (face masks, sanitizers, alcohol) and food to distressed migrants.
- Develop emergency support in both migrant destination and origin countries to include migrants and their families regardless of their status.
- Develop a clear health policy ensuring diagnosis and treatment will be free if migrants contract COVID-19 regardless of their status (e.g. undocumented or stateless, HIV+, etc.)

MIGRANTS IN THE GCM

16. Ensure meaningful and effective participation and engagement of migrants and civil society in the GCM process at the global, regional, national and local levels.

Develop awareness and capacity of migrants on the GCM. Ensure popular language of the GCM as well as translate relevant documents in the migrants' mother languages.

17. Transform the GCM in order that it serves and upholds frameworks and mechanisms that address migrants' multi-faceted concerns as well as promotes their rights and well-being.

18. Lobby governments to adopt the GCM.

Shame non-signatories into action.

19. Adopt the UN Convention for the Protection of Migrant Workers and Their Families.

Regional Migrants' Agenda

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and/or French.

P.S.

Karibu Foundation

<https://www.karibu.no/newsletter/2021/04/towards-a-world-without-forced-migration-19-key-demands-from-migrant-groups-in-asia-pacific/>