



# MIGRATION, COVID-19 AND A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerabilities of migrant workers that have existed for decades while at the same time, it has provided us with an opportunity to reflect on what needs to change in order for us to build better forward. Through a series of webinars and online consultations, global civil society came together aiming to identify solutions to migration-related issues that are action-oriented, innovative, rights-based, and rooted in the SDGs<sup>1</sup>. Below are the key focused areas that have been put forward that need fervent attention in a world living with and beyond the pandemic:

## ADDRESSING THE DECENT WORK DEFICIT

In addressing the decent work deficit, there is a need to address the underlying and structural impediments that maintain it. Temporary labour migration is a flawed system that exploits and disempowers migrant workers with countries of destination (CODs) acquiring most of the benefits from employing migrants. States should implement pathways to regularization and/or citizenship for essential workers who have contributed in significant ways to ensuring the continuance of sectors of the economy during the pandemic. Further, States should implement universal social protection that would act as a security blanket for migrant workers and their families.

## THE NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT

The Global Compact on Migration - GCM<sup>2</sup>, despite its 23 objectives and its call for a whole of society and whole of government approach, is not legally binding to UN Member States. The implementation of the GCM objectives is not enough to address decent work deficits and systemic labour issues such as high recruitment costs, wage theft, and lack of access to services for migrants in CODs. We need a new social contract. These are extraordinary times and it will not be possible for stakeholders to resolve these issues through normal means. The new social contract should involve all stakeholders, including civil society and migrant organizations in designing, implementing, and monitoring migration programmes.

## ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

Accessing justice for migrant workers in relation to their labour rights should not be tied to their migration status. States should remove barriers prohibiting migrants from filing complaints, especially those under temporary visa schemes, to prevent exploitation such as wage theft or other forms of abuse by employers. If we are to build better forward, labour laws and protections should be enjoyed by all workers, regardless of their status.

## POWER TO ORGANIZE COLLECTIVELY

The pandemic has highlighted the linkages in our society, how one affects the other. Therefore, states should leave no one behind, especially migrants, in their race to herd immunity and recovery. It is by dismantling discrimination and promoting just inclusion that we realize our collective power and not only of the selected or privileged.

States should also learn from one another's good practices as well as mistakes and uphold their international commitments to human rights, solidarity, peace, and development. In doing so, states can start by looking at migrants as part of the solution rather than a liability, respecting migrants' rights, including their right to organize, freedom to form associations, and participate in collective actions for their mutual benefit.

## TOWARDS GENDER AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The grim reality is not only gender imbalance but injustice as the pandemic made women more vulnerable to violence, abuse, and exploitation<sup>3</sup>. Women, often already being paid lower than male workers, are being forced to juggle their jobs with household, care, or unpaid work<sup>4</sup>. Many women migrant workers are in the informal sector or in low-skilled jobs that are not protected by labour laws. Violence against women, human trafficking, and barriers to women's labour mobility remain key issues as well. Even recovery is a winding road for women as the ILO predicts that fewer migrant women will be re-employed post-COVID<sup>5</sup>. States, then, should not just protect but most importantly, empower women by being gender-sensitive and gender-responsive. Building a better future should be based on rights and justice instead of flawed systems that have fed on cheap labour and exploited women.

<sup>1</sup> [2030 Sustainable Development Goals](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Devastatingly pervasive: 1 in 3 women globally experience violence](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Global wage growth lowest since 2008, while women still earning 20 per cent less than men](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Fewer women than men will regain employment during the COVID-19 recovery, says ILO](#)