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Roundtable Background Paper (December 2020)

**GFMD Roundtable 3 (RT3):
Leveraging New Technologies to Empower Migrants**

**Roundtable Co-chairs:
Republic of The Philippines
Republic of Kenya**

**Thematic Lead:
Gibril Faal**

Roundtable Background Paper

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1. Introduction

In May 2020, leading to the GFMD Regional Consultative Process (RCP), a thematic note was published to guide discussions on ‘Leveraging New Technologies to Empower Migrants’. The theme was discussed in breakout sessions at two of the RCPs meetings, namely the Bali Process session on 29 June 2020 and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue session on 9 July 2020. There were 92 participants representing 60 entities, of which 22 were governments and the remaining 38 were international organisations, municipalities, business networks and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) comprising migrant organisations, worker representatives and research institutions. Of the 92 participants, 27 made verbal interventions, of which, 13 were government officials¹. The discussions focussed on the five key questions that were incorporated in the thematic note, namely:

- Examples of Migration-Related Technology Platforms
- How to Optimise Data Sharing and Processing
- How to Improve Trust, Accessibility and Usage
- How to Reduce Recruitment and Remittance Costs
- How to Improve Access to Welfare Services.

This roundtable background paper originates from the report of RCP meetings published in August 2020. The paper benefited from consultative discussions at the thematic Practitioner Group meeting on 18 September 2020 and the Roundtable meeting on 1 October 2020, held under the guidance and leadership of the Philippines and Kenya as the GFMD thematic roundtable co-chairs. These sessions had 35 participants from eight member states, the three GFMD mechanisms and three observer organisations². Furthermore, eight written submissions were received³, supplemented by additional synthesis, desk research and analysis.

The main purpose of the background paper is to highlight facts and trends on the policy and practice of ‘leveraging new technologies to empower migrants’, and identify gaps, priorities, policy options and practice opportunities. Such analytical background should assist member states and other stakeholders to focus their summit discussions and contributions on the practicalities of how to leverage, expand and enhance ever evolving new technologies, to empower migrants of different gender and age groups from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and circumstances. Using technology to empower migrants is applicable to sending, transit and host countries, and member states may develop programmes to address all migration patterns throughout all stages of the mobility continuum.

2. Overview of Relevant Technological Trends

To a great extent, we live in an information age. For the purposes of this paper, discussions of new technologies relate mainly to Information and Communication Technology (ICT). In the field of migration management, a number of relevant megatrends are highlighted and discussed below.

2.1 Smart Phones and Internet Access

For migration-related management and other sectors, two key industry realities have become defining factors, namely the global ubiquity, preponderance and standardisation of smart mobile phones; and internet communication. The impact of these developments is so profound that they have become public utilities. Many

¹ Bali Process: 51 participants, 33 entities, of which 9 were governments; 15 verbal interventions, 5 were government officials

Abu Dhabi Dialogue: 41 participants, 27 entities, of which 13 were governments; 12 verbal interventions, 8 were government officials.

² The delegates to the two meetings were: 21 from 8 member states, 8 from the 3 GFMD mechanisms, and 6 from 3 observer organisations.

³ Thematic papers were received from the governments of the Philippines and Switzerland, and the GFMD Business Mechanism; written comments were received from IFAD, IOM (Immigration and Border Management Division), IOM (Migration Health Divisions), UNDP and UNICEF.

people have access to them, and it is likely that in the near future, they would be generally recognised by the global community as an integral part of the portfolio of basic human rights. In the Philippines for example, 73 million citizens, i.e. to 67% of the total population are internet and social media users, of which 70.45 million access the internet through mobile phones⁴. Lack of access to mobile phones and the internet undermines the quality of most, if not all measures of socioeconomic welfare and human rights.

2.2 App-Based Specialist Services

As the ongoing improvement of both the mobile phone and internet industries proceeds, innovations and new technological developments in different sectors seem to be focussed on how to use these two megafacilitators to improve general, specialist and personalised services. To leverage new technologies to empower migrants, governments and other stakeholders are likely to have maximum impact by focussing on problem-solving and facilitative apps, software, products and services, as well as adequate connectivity and accessibility, data security and information storage infrastructure.

2.3 Front-End Interoperability

Another important trend in ICT is front-end interoperability, with a person's individual mobile device being able to communicate with the infrastructure of institutions and corporations. For example, a Quick Response (QR) code on a person's mobile phone can be used to access secure data on an institution's database and IT system.

To create and manage products and services that are beneficial to migrants and migration-related stakeholders, developments need to focus on back-end innovations, including security and storage infrastructure (servers and cloud based), and bespoke programming and design software and applications. To a great extent, industry has taken care of front-end infrastructure such that off-the-shelf products generally communicate with each other using a variety of standardised inter-device connectivity technologies. However, international protocols and multilateral agreements are needed to check and prevent monopolistic and predatory industry practices, whilst aiming for universal front-end interoperability.

3. Empowering Migrants by Leveraging Technology

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) identified specific areas in which the use of technology and digitalisation can improve the welfare of migrants. These include: provision of identity and consular documentations (Obj. 4 [20a & 20c]); biometric data sharing (Obj. 4 [20b]); border management (Obj. 11 [27b]); application procedures (Obj. 12 [28a]); accessing help lines and databases (Obj. 14 [30e]); skills recognition (Obj. 18 [34d]); financial and philanthropic engagement (Obj. 19 [35f]); and remittance, mobile payments and e-banking (Obj. 20 [36e]). The goal of these provisions is to improve efficient migration management and development engagement, whilst protecting migrant privacy rights⁵.

During the GFMD consultative process, governments and other stakeholders indicated their recognition that technology is a crosscutting subject, relevant to different aspects of migration management and migrant empowerment. The potential to use technology for empowerment is extensive, but a number of factors need to be considered and addressed in order to turn potentiality into actual reality.

⁴ Digital 2020: The Philippines, 18 February 2020: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-philippines>

⁵ See GCM final draft: https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/180711_final_draft_0.pdf

3.1 Policy and Practice for Empowerment

In practice, technology is neither neutral nor is it necessarily always a good thing. It can be a double-edged sword, and it is amenable to being used for good or bad, relating to migrants. As such, it should be seen as a tool rather than a panacea, and be used with alertness, positive purposefulness, and with necessary checks and balances from diverse stakeholders.

The existing migration-related tech-platforms are generally set up to expand and enhance services to migrants. This by itself can empower migrants, even though that may not necessarily be the fundamental and foundational goal of the platform. Given the doubled-edged nature of technology, governments should purposefully commit to the principle of empowering migrants as a virtue in itself, accepted as beneficial to all stakeholders, in line with agreed global and regional frameworks. Leveraging technology to empower migrants is predicated on generating policy and practice that expands and enhances actual and potential benefits, whilst eliminating and mitigating the ever evolving nature of attendant negative factors.

3.2 E-Government and Digital-Nations

Most governments are committed to the use of technology for migration-related services. This commitment is rooted in national strategies and policies within the wider context of setting up e-government and digital-nation capabilities. Many governments already run migration-related tech-platforms, although the levels of operational success vary immensely.

Given the uneven nature of migration-related tech services, there is a need for mechanisms and processes to assess best practices of digitalisation of migration management. This would amongst other things, increase knowledge and understanding, highlight dos and don'ts, and identify exemplar countries and private sector operators in the sector. These can lead to e-government and digital-nation infrastructure and ecosystems partnerships, covering services and functions such as: immigration, identity and border management, migrant labour recruitment and management, remittances and financial inclusion, and other forms of development engagement.

3.3 Actions for Empowering Migrants

New technologies have the innate ability to empower migrants in different ways. In line with existing global migration, human rights and development frameworks, technology can be leveraged for migrant empowerment actions focussing on:

- Optimising information and data sharing and processing
- Improving trust, accessibility and usage of migration-related tech platforms and services
- Reducing the cost of migrant recruitment, immigration, visa and permit procedures
- Reducing the cost of remittances and increasing financial inclusion
- Innovations in enhancing migrant livelihoods
- Improving migrant access to welfare services
- Protecting and supporting undocumented and vulnerable migrants.

The categories above can serve as a guide for States, partners and other stakeholders planning the introduction of tech platforms and services to engage and empower migrants and diasporas. As part of the GFMD Business Mechanism activities, in 2020 the global "Migration Challenge" was launched, as a partnership between International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and Seedstars, supported by the government of Switzerland. The Challenge as a tech and business competition supports startups proposing innovative migration-related technological services and business models.

3.4 Effective and Equitable Service Delivery

As part of e-government and digital-nation programmes, many governments see migration-related tech platforms and services as means of improving general migration management and extending public services to their citizens abroad, including the expansion of consular support.

There seem to be two foundational elements needed to build enough trust for migrants to use these tech facilities. First, they should deliver services in an effective and efficient operational manner which actual and potential users find useful and beneficial. Second, services need to be provided in an overtly fair and equitable manner, from the perspective of the diverse users coming from different socioeconomic backgrounds. With such a premise, the platforms address needs and wants, whilst anticipating and responding to migrant expectations.

3.5 Digitally Enabled Livelihoods

Digital technology can help create new livelihood options and opportunities. It facilitates innovation and the development of new products and services, whilst providing a marketplace as well as access to markets. This great potentiality is available to those with the required skills and aptitudes, and access to the relevant technology, including migrants and their communities. In some cases, the technology acts as an equaliser, giving fairer chances of success to people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including migrants, especially women and youth. In the context of the COVID 19 pandemic, digitally enabled livelihoods present a great potential to bridge the gap between renewed labour market needs and the skills and expertise of migrant workers who have lost their jobs or have experienced a significant drop in income, especially those in the informal economy.

UNDP has been promoting digitally enabled livelihoods for crisis-affected populations, with a strong focus on youth, women and migrants, especially those forcibly displaced. The report '*Migrant Union: Digital Livelihoods for People on the Move*'⁶ explores the nexus between the changing nature of work, particularly driven by digitalisation, and livelihood opportunities for forcibly displaced people. Projects on the ground include UNDP support to Syrian refugees in Turkey and displaced people in Bangladesh by introducing and integrating their products and services on well-established procurement tech platforms, run by public institutions and private organisations.

Work is central to migration, and technology enables diverse forms of migration-related job creation. Of the 258 million migrants in 2017, 164 million, i.e. 64 percent were labour migrants⁷. In 2016, McKinsey & Co reported that migrants contributed disproportionately to job creation through the formation of both large and small businesses⁸. Migrants are not only jobseekers but job creators as well. Technology enables and enhances migrant innovation and entrepreneurship, leading to new jobs in countries of residence and within the globalised value chain. Jobs are created and livelihoods enhanced directly and indirectly through tech-related migrant and diaspora investments, e-commerce and international trade.

⁶ See report: <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/the-migrant-union-.html>

⁷ ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers – Results and Methodology; https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_652001.pdf

⁸ McKinsey Global Institute 2016 report on 'People on the Move: Global Migration's Impact and Opportunity' <https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Industries/Public%20and%20Social%20Sector/Our%20Insights/Global%20migrations%20impact%20and%20opportunity/MGI-People-on-the-Move-Full-report.pdf>

4. Improving the Effectiveness of Migration-Related Tech Platforms and Services

Having reviewed different types of migration-related tech platforms and services operated by governments, corporations and civil society organisations in different parts of the world, it is possible to identify common characteristics and features. Understanding the structure and operations of existing tech facilities can help in designing improvements to expand and enhance the positive impacts for migrants.

4.1 Typology of Migration Tech Platforms and Services

Migration-related tech platforms and services assist and support prospective and actual migrants through the processes of migration, employment, sending and receiving remittances, managing social and earned benefits, and accessing welfare services. These platforms vary in interactivity and can be classified into the main types set below. (Low interactive platforms are common; one-to-one welfare platforms are rarer).

- Non-interactive information and awareness-raising platforms
- Exchange, dialogue and consultative platforms
- Applications and document processing platforms
- Matching and specialist service provision platforms
- One-to-one welfare service platforms.

4.2 Migration Management Technology

The migration continuum of pre-departure, travelling, living and working abroad, diaspora engagement, circular and actual return, involves a wide range of bureaucratic, administrative and operational processes. These standardised and repetitive tasks are amenable to machine processing, including machine interactions through chatbots, virtual assistants and related software, able to provide feedback and exchange in text and/or speech, in different languages. Machine learning, artificial intelligence and other technological advances have facilitated automated identity and document checking and validation.

However, data protection considerations and safeguards are needed to avoid unmediated reliance on automated solutions and machine decision-making. To protect the integrity of immigration procedures and processes as well as migrant rights and entitlements, standardised machine processes need to be actively moderated by competent officials and professionals.

4.3 Tech-Based Migration Processing

Case studies around the world indicate that core migration processes can undergo transformational change and improvement through the use of technology. These processes include amongst other things:

- Visa and permit applications, issuances and extensions
- Worker recruitment, interviews, selection, induction and ongoing training
- Ticketing, check-in, security clearance and boarding for air and international travel
- Wages, remittances and trans-boundary financial services.

Migrant databases can also help improve migration management systems in a manner that satisfy national regulatory requirements without putting onerous, intrusive and unfair constraints on migrants. Employers can share and update migrant worker details with national authorities, without the need to take possession of the documents of migrants, a practice that infringes on migrant and labour rights.

4.4 Social Media and Specialist Platforms

Governments and other operators use existing global social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Telegram, Tiktok, Twitter and WhatsApp to reach vast numbers of their migrants and diaspora. This form of communication is likely to continue simply because of the convenience, relative low cost and extensive reach. These platforms are effective for information sharing, meetings, seminars and one-to-many advisory sessions. However, it is recognised that specialist and tailor-made platforms are needed to address the specific and specialist requirements of different categories of migrants, bearing in mind language, age group, gender, socioeconomic background, technicality of migrant queries, and confidentiality and privacy of migrants.

4.5 Linkages, Portals and Comparators

Irrespective of which entity runs a migration-related tech service, or the primary operational purpose of the service, data sharing can be optimised by adding functionalities and links so that the platform or service acts as a portal or entry point, leading to other relevant and useful information.

Linked and enhanced platforms can also serve as one-stop-shops that deliver a portfolio of core services, and provide easy access to a wide range of migration-related services delivered by other governments, institutions, businesses, civil society organisations and other providers. They can also provide lists and comparison functionalities for relevant third party services such as ethical recruitment agents, travel and freight agents, and Money Transfer Operators.

4.6 Multi-Purpose Platform Usage

In addition to information sharing and service delivery, migration-related tech platforms can serve multiple and complementary purposes including:

- Being online interactive communities of migrants for mutual learning and support
- Youth, gender, occupational or thematic forums
- Hub for user surveys, research and rating of migration-related services
- Forum for research and consultations on policy and practice
- Repository of relevant information, presented in different languages and in multiple formats including text, audios and visuals.

4.7 Migration, Technology and COVID 19 Lessons

The COVID 19 pandemic has affected migration and migrants in many ways, whilst bringing to the fore the opportunities for initiating and extending usage of technology to share information, and the need to mitigate challenges and improve migrant welfare and migration management systems. Some of the COVID 19 observations and lessons learnt are summarised below.

- I. Visa Compliance:** Huge numbers of migrants became stranded around the world, affecting their ability to comply with visa requirements or access offices for renewals and extensions. Existing technology allows for remote and distant document and identity checking and verification, including use of secure methods such as iris and facial recognition, through smart phones and other personal phones. It is possible for the entirety of all immigration processing to be digital, including formal online interviews and identity verification. For every technological expansion, due consideration should be given to migrant accessibility, to avoid heightening digital exclusion or widening the digital divide.
- II. Online Education:** UNICEF has reported that with the closure of schools and use of online education platforms during the pandemic, the digital divide that affect significant numbers of migrants has been

exacerbated. Only one in four children on the move has access to the internet in Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan⁹. International students who constitute a significant number of the global migrant population have also been negatively affected. Apart from disruption to lessons, they have been affected by housing, visa and financial flow difficulties. Policymakers and practitioners need to reflect further on how to harness technology to address real and actual constraints.

- III. **Emergency Contact:** Huge numbers of migrants, including domestic and low income workers, and vulnerable migrants, lost their jobs and some also lost their accommodation, becoming distressed and destitute. Technology already enables governments and other organisations to operate migrant help lines and databases. Keeping these services current and up to date enables support agencies to reach migrants in times of emergency to provide information, guidance and assistance, including coordination for relief and evacuations.
- IV. **Cash and Remittances:** Most physical locations for sending and receiving remittances were closed due to lockdowns or other public health regulations¹⁰. Cash-handling also increased the risk of infection. This scenario highlighted the importance of extending and expanding of digital financial services. New technologies offer versatile tools for measured, commensurate and appropriate regulation of remittances, including verification and monitoring for electronic Know-Your-Customer (eKYC), Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Countering Financing of Terrorism (CFT). Technology also allows for easier platform interoperability, wider geographical coverage for services, including rural areas and economically deprived locations, and general cost reduction in line with the SDGs. Kenya is one of the world leaders in the use of mobile money, and the application of the technology to remittances has stimulated general growth and resilience during the pandemic. In Kenya and many other countries Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs), it is now possible to go through the entire process of opening bank accounts through remote tech-enabled platforms. Recently, the Overseas Filipino Bank has launched its digital-only platform, thereby improving financial inclusion of migrants and diaspora. It also facilitates expanded and versatile app-based bank accounts, mobile wallets and digital remittance services, which can be linked to wages, remittances, social security benefits, pensions, and many more related and linked financial services.
- V. **Response on Remittances:** Coordinated global responses emerged in response to the COVID 19 disruption to remittance services and flows, the unprecedented decline in remittance volumes projected by the World Bank, and the call by the UN Secretary General for global solidarity. The governments of Switzerland and the United Kingdom launched the 'Call to Action: Remittances in Crisis: How to Keep the Flowing', with institutional partners such as World Bank/KNOMAD and UNCDF¹¹, and IFAD launched the 'Remittance Community Task Force' with public and private stakeholders¹². It is notable that both these global responses identified the use of technology as central to the evolution and development of the remittance and financial inclusion sectors, for the benefit of migrants and their families, and to build resilience and advance the SDGs.
- VI. **Migrant Wages:** The technology can help to improve accountability and reduce wage disputes, which has been a major for migrants during the pandemic. Digital finance can also be linked to investment options and payments for general services and personal shopping. Given that these digital services are based on artificial intelligence, machine learning, Blockchain and other new technologies, they reduce the cost of processing, and the resulting cost savings should be passed on or shared with migrants.

⁹ <https://blogs.unicef.org/evidence-for-action/children-on-the-move-in-east-africa-research-insights-to-mitigate-covid-19/>

¹⁰ In the UK, the diaspora organisation AFFORD, successfully lobbied the government for Money Transfer Operators to be classified as essential services and were allowed to open. <https://www.afford-uk.org/uk-govt-classifies-remittances-as-essential-service/>

¹¹ <https://www.knomad.org/covid-19-remittances-call-to-action/>

¹² <https://familyremittances.org/idfr-2020/the-remittance-community-task-force/>

VII. Repatriations and Advice: Philippines have one of the largest populations of migrant workers in the world. When the pandemic hit, the government repatriated over 200,000 distressed and stranded Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) and Overseas Filipinos (OFs), and brought to life its approach of 'high-tech, low-touch'. Existing tech platforms and databases were used, but the power of social media was harnessed as an effective tool for mass communication, information sharing and migrant engagement. Set up in September 2019, a few months before the pandemic, as at October 2020, the Facebook page had already gained 58,000 followers, and achieved a cumulative reach of over 1 million. It is used for regular online Town Hall meetings between senior government officials, OFWs, OFs and other stakeholders. At the height of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, the online events for the Middle East reached an average of 120,000 people per event. Facebook Messenger has also been used as a 24 hour service for OFW to send private messages and receive specific one-to-one advice within two hours. Necessities arising from the pandemic have led to new and efficient tech services for migrants and the diaspora. Other services such as mandatory and elective pre-departure orientation seminars and psychosocial services have also gone digital and online.

5. Enhancing the Usage of New Technologies through Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

The new technologies themselves are generally developed by the private sector, be it multinational tech corporations or innovative specialist and start-up companies. To create and maintain international standards for tech platforms and services, multilateral bodies and international organisations have a critical role to play. At the user end, migrant, diaspora and other civil society organisations can be effective brokers and connectors, helping maximise usage. Independently, academic and research institutions can provide empirical assessments and insights on concepts, effectiveness and impact relating to the theme of applying new technologies to empower migrants. Given the diversity of relevant competencies, expertise and mandates, practice-based multi-stakeholder partnerships are essential to optimise the deployment and usage of migration-related tech platforms and services.

5.1 Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

In addition to using global social media platforms for migration-related information sharing, multi-stakeholder collaboration can deliver multiple benefits and dividends to diverse partners, not just migrants. Partnerships can include the global tech companies, new and innovative specialists, civil society, regional and international organisations, and groups of countries. Services, functionalities and platform design can be expanded, replicated and upgraded through partnerships.

Open software packages can be used to construct the platforms and service, where applicable. It is important to use software and functionalities which facilitate open and easy accessibility for migrants using different types of devices and mobile phones. International organisations such as UNESCO can work with educational institutions globally to serve as a repository for formal certificates, thereby providing trusted third party verification of migrant qualifications. The Oracle Corporation has worked with consulting firms to develop a Blockchain platform for identifying and verifying the qualifications, experiences, and professional credentials of highly skilled migrants. This and similar integrated tech platforms providing easy to use, cost-effective and reliable employment related services are suitable for migrant workers at all levels, disciplines and sectors.

5.2 Interoperability and Intermediation

Complementary to government technology platforms, there are many other digital and online services run by civil society, international and other types of organisations. This diversity can be a good thing, but it needs to be matched with stronger partnerships through multi-stakeholder functionalities and platform integration. In practice, this would mean ensuring intra-operability amongst the different government platforms, and inter-operability with platforms run by non-government and foreign government partners.

Due to reasons such as literacy challenges, lack of awareness, distrust of government and formal institutions, many migrants are refraining from using tech platforms despite the fact that they can benefit from services on offer. Migrant and civil society organisations that work with different categories of migrants can serve as brokers, intermediaries and partners, helping build trust and improve access to services. In a partnership project run by UNDP and the government of Bangladesh, Expatriate Digital Centres (EDCs) are set up in different cities in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East, providing a physical drop-in facility to use technological resources and services.

5.3 International Principles and Standards

Given the trans-boundary nature of migration and the global dimensions of new technology, international standards, guidelines and frameworks for migration tech platforms and services can be an important basis for building trust and enhancing access and usage. In order to promote interoperability of platforms run by different governments and diverse entities, an international and multi-stakeholder approach is needed.

There are reputable institutions with experience and competency in setting up and supporting the implementation of global principles and best practices relating to the effective and fair use of technology¹³. However, it appears that migration-related tech platforms are not formally and substantively connected to these institutions. In the context of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), it is important for frameworks like GFMD to engage with bodies such as the International Standards Organization (ISO), as well as global technology governance and citizen privacy organisations, to set up and oversee relevant guiding principles and international standards.

6. Protecting Migrants from the Negative Elements of New Technologies

In addition to purposefully using technology to provide beneficial services and opportunities to migrants, it is equally important to proactively mitigate technological risks and protect migrants from the real and inherent perils associated with new technologies.

6.1 Privacy, Regulations and Compliance

Bearing in mind the double-edged nature of technology, fair and ethical regulations are needed. These regulations and the monitoring and encouragement of compliance need to be seen as part of a process to empower migrants, as opposed to disadvantaging them, through spying, censorship, undue control and other acts that undermine migrant rights and privacy.

Platforms should not be used by governments and other operators as subterfuge for collecting personal and group information for purposes beyond the empowerment of the migrants. This fundamental principle of migrant and user privacy and empowerment does not prevent operators undertaking data analyses aimed at improving the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of services.

6.2 Transparency and Technological Bias

All tech platforms and services are prone to algorithmic bias, negative profiling and other discriminatory tendencies. These can be hidden and embedded in machine systems through either the original and updated coding, or through routine machine learning. As such, machine based processing and operations need to be

¹³ One example is 'Principles for Digital Development' - <https://digitalprinciples.org/>

accompanied by ongoing and rigorous checks and corrections, as well as facility and functionality for human intervention and discretionary reviews.

One of the most effective ways of ensuring fairness and ongoing improvement is openness and transparency about principles, facts, figures, outputs and challenges of the tech-platform. This enables all stakeholders to provide their experiences and perspectives, providing relevant ‘open-source’ input to complement other analytical and technical tasks linked to the ongoing monitoring and improvement of the technological platforms and services.

6.3 Fact-Checking and Fake-Checking

As is common practice, it is important for tech platforms and services to undertake structured and ongoing fact-checking to verify the accuracy and relevance of the information and content on platforms. Structured and ongoing fake-checking has now become a necessity for platform and service operators. This is due to the fact that new technology is versatile, making it relatively easy and cheap for online fraudsters, scammers and chancers to set up fake platforms for fraudulent and nefarious purposes. Fake platforms can be used to steal financial and identity details, and for extortion, blackmail, harassment and trolling. Platform operators need to fake-check to ensure that their platforms are not cloned or infected with malware that steal data and information.

In line with multi-stakeholder partnerships, search engines and global social media platforms can cooperate with governments to ban, track, find and take down fake and exploitative platforms that charge extortionate sums for government services such as online visa applications (which the government websites provide at a nominal fee).

6.4 Options, Alternatives and the Digital Divide

Even though the tech-platforms are capable of providing a wide range of services effectively and efficiently, it is important that face-to-face services remain as options and alternatives for those who cannot use tech-platforms. The reality is that a digital divide exists, with certain groups of citizens having limited capacity and capability to use new technology, as a result of limited digital literacy, their socioeconomic status, and lack of access to facilities and devices such as smart phones, ipads, computers and affordable internet access.

Although migrants may be more likely to be tech users than the average citizen, nonetheless people on the move and prospective migrants are affected by the digital divide. As States and providers of public and private services extend and expand digitalisation, those affected by digital poverty risk being left behind through service discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion. The development of technologies for migration management needs to be complemented with the provision of appropriate non-digital options and alternatives, to ensure that mobility remains accessible to all, particularly those in vulnerable situations.

7. Empowering Migrants by Reducing the Cost of Migration

Given that there are specific SDG targets relating to remittance and recruitment costs, it is not surprising that migration-related cost reduction programmes tend to focus on these two costs. However, tech platforms and services provide the opportunity to monitor other forms of migration costs with the view to reducing them.

7.1 Visa and Permit Fees

Foremost amongst the costs that need to be monitored and lowered are the direct fees and indirect costs charged by governments and public institutions for visas, residence permits, identity cards and other required documentations. These are generally given low prominence despite the fact that in some countries migrant

families are prevented from attaining certain status they are otherwise entitled to (including permanent residence and citizenship) due to high and prohibitive fees levied by governments. These high fees are particularly problematic as many migrants fall under low-income brackets.

7.2 Cost Bearing and Fair Fees

To reduce costs incurred by migrants, tech platform and service operators need to adopt the principle that expenditure on the construction and development of the platforms and other infrastructure are treated as social and developmental investments to be borne by the operator. These costs should not be passed on to migrants. The cost bearing principle does not prevent operators charging reasonable fees for their services. Furthermore, where fees are to be levied, they should be open, fair and proportionate, devoid of any element of profiteering and exploitation, so as to genuinely empower migrants – the majority of whom are low and mid income earners. These principles apply to commercial, social enterprise and government platforms and services.

7.3 Monitoring and Promotion of Agreements

There are SDG targets, GCM commitments, ILO standards, IOM programmes, World Bank and IFAD schemes and other agreements, protocols and frameworks relating to the reduction of the cost of migrant recruitment and remittances. Tech platforms and services can provide ongoing monitoring, performance and compliance data and intelligence specific to individual countries and migration corridors. Up to date empirical data from the platforms can inform ever evolving bespoke responses to stimulate, promote and incentivise performance to achieve the targets in the existing agreements.

7.4 Cost and Service Comparison and Rating

Remittance cost comparison websites have been around for about 20 years. New technologies provide the opportunity for comparisons to be corridor specific, more precise, covering both transfer fees and hidden foreign exchange charges, using real-time data. Such enhanced cost comparison can also be applied to recruitment costs.

Furthermore, cost comparisons can be complemented by service delivery ratings and comparison. This can expose and weed out unethical companies and promote fair business competition, leading to improved services, reduced costs and higher value for money. The tech platforms and services can provide the information and functionalities in easy formats for different devices and mobile phones. Key facts, figures and observations can also be provided in text, audio and visual illustrations in different languages to suit the needs of different categories of migrants.

7.5 Linked and Complementary Services

There are many linked and complementary financial and professional development services that migrants need which, through the use of technology can be provided at minimal marginal cost by the Fintech, remittance and recruitment companies.

Remittances can be linked to related services such as: payments for services and goods; health insurance; school and education payment plans; bank accounts and mobile wallets; wage and salary processing; personal financial profile and credit-rating; savings, investments and loans; voluntary contribution to pensions and social security schemes. The governments of Switzerland and Sweden, in partnership with UNCDF are supporting new schemes in this field through the 'Building Inclusive Digital Economies for Migrants' programme.

Migrant recruitment can be linked to related services such as: recognition and validation of skills and experiences; standardisation and skills development and career guidance; training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD); visa, permit and document renewals. Using technology and multi-stakeholder partnerships to develop and offer related services can enable companies to capitalise on operational synergies, whilst expanding service and commercial relationships with their existing client-base.

8. Improving Migrant Access to Welfare Services

Beyond improved migration management services, new technologies open up unprecedented ways and means of providing innovative and cost effective welfare services to migrants. Technological facilities and innovation can help address some of the most urgent and severe welfare challenges faced by migrants, as highlighted below.

8.1 Technology as Welfare Right

Access to technology should be treated as a human and migrant right. This is important not only for people to benefit from the options and opportunities available, but to end current practices whereby migrants are prevented from accessing technology and communication devices. This deprives them access to their families and to information and knowledge relevant to their welfare. In the current cyber-age, access to online information and resources, and the ability to communicate through mobile devices has become a new utility service, comparable to access to electricity and energy. People deprived of it suffer degradation of their welfare. As such, access should be based on affordable costs and minimal bureaucracy.

8.2 Infrastructure and Innovation for Accessibility and Affordability

In order to reduce the existing digital divide, governments have a key role to play in creating an enabling and regulatory environment with policy clarity, process predictability and incentives for investments, innovation and quality. These would ensure appropriate developments in technological infrastructure and services, and continuous accessibility, fair pricing and general affordability. This technological penetration with broadband and other forms of reliable connectivity is of particular importance in rural areas and deprived communities, which may be neglected by tech investors. Although migrants predominantly reside in urban areas in host countries, significant numbers originate from rural and deprived communities and their families remain there. As such, technological accessibility in these areas serves as effective channels for family and development for the migrants.

The need for an integrated approach is already understood and adopted by many States. In Uganda, the National Financial Inclusion Strategy (2017-2022) led by the Central Bank and Ministry of Finance, commits to close co-working with the Uganda Communication Commission to build digital infrastructure as a key factor in financial inclusion¹⁴. In the Philippines, renewed emphasis on tech platforms and services is outlined in the country's E-Government Master Plan (EGMP)¹⁵ and is to be incorporated in a proposed new chapter in the Philippines Development Plan (PDP 2017-22).

In some countries like Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, corporations have taken the lead in facilitating affordable online access by providing access to social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp free of charge with their SIM cards (subscribers do not use their paid-for internet service or mobile phone data to access and use these platforms).

The full potential of technological innovation is yet to be fully deployed to address the SDGs, including the needs of migrants, displaced people and marginalised groups. In the field of Fintech, the potential of sound

¹⁴ https://www.bou.or.ug/bou/bouwebsite/bouwebsitecontent/publications/special_pubs/2017/National-Financial-Inclusion-Strategy.pdf

¹⁵ EGMP 2022 Abridged Version: https://dict.gov.ph/ictstatistics/wpcontent/uploads/2019/07/EGMP_Book_Abridged.pdf

wave-based technology was already proven a decade ago¹⁶. This enables digital money and mobile wallet transactions without access to the internet, payment of connectivity costs, use of a smart phone, or major infrastructure or installation costs for vendors and service providers¹⁷. New technologies such as this are particularly appropriate for least developed countries, which is the very reason why they tend not to get the attention and investment required.

8.3 Friendship and Integration Networks

It is very common for migrants to suffer from unfair negative perceptions and xenophobia. These arise from deliberate onslaughts of negative propaganda and falsehoods, and institutionalised misperceptions and bias, to the detriment of migrant safety and welfare. Rebuttal through hard and dry rational acts such as provision of facts and figures is not enough to counter ingrained perceptions. Credible facts need to be complemented with soft, emotional, cultural and interpersonal responses. Tech-platforms can play key roles in promoting fair, positive and empathetic perceptions of migrants, thus contributing to migrant integration and social cohesion.

‘Soft-power’ migration-related tech platforms include: host-migrant befriending and exchange schemes; cultural exchange and solidarity hubs; community, volunteering and integration networks; national and multimedia campaigns. In some cases mobile phone charges for specific country corridors are exceptionally high, thereby creating enforced isolation. Partnerships can be developed with mobile telephone companies to ensure availability of suitable and affordable phone plan packages, given that contact with family and friends is both a social and welfare issue. Special packages can be offered to vulnerable migrants and to migrant key workers.

8.4 Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

Tech platforms, services and apps can be used to monitor, document and warn against entities and outfits involved in human trafficking, modern slavery and other illegal and unethical practices against migrants. A multi-stakeholder approach can ensure that verified data can come from national law enforcement and judicial sources, specialist international and non-governmental organisations, and other reputable sources. Similar to other monitoring platforms, these can be country and corridor specific, with functionalities and information available in different formats and languages.

8.5 Access to Tele-Justice

The COVID 19 pandemic has highlighted the need and opportunities for tech platforms devoted to access to justice for migrants, facilitating remote and online adjudication. Migrant tele-justice platforms can incorporate the elements, structure and protocols of employment tribunals, arbitration and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) frameworks, addressing claims and grievances relating to migrant wages, service charges and deductions, social benefits and other contractual issues. A multi-stakeholder approach can be based on existing ILO and other frameworks, bringing together government agencies, employer federations, employee representatives, legal aid, migrant and civil society organisations, and relevant international bodies.

8.6 Access to Tele-Medicine

Tele-medicine platforms can be used to provide medical services to migrants, especially those without regular status or otherwise denied access to health services. They can also be used to maintain continuity of medical services. Through tele-medicine, itinerant and seasonal workers, short term migrants and other people on the

¹⁶ Article in MIT Technology Review on 20 June 2011, on ‘Ultrasound app lets almost any phone pay’: <https://www.technologyreview.com/2011/06/20/118435/ultrasound-app-lets-almost-any-phone-pay/>

¹⁷ Article in Entrepreneur.com on 15 November 2019 on ‘The significance of soundwave technology-based payments’: <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/342435>

move can continue receiving services from the same set of medical professionals, irrespective of their physical location.

Furthermore, migrant and diaspora medical practitioners based in different countries can use tech-platforms to provide medical support as part of voluntary and social enterprise programmes. A multi-stakeholder approach can bring together tech and medical companies, local hospitals, humanitarian charities, migrant and diaspora organisations to support vulnerable migrants. Partnerships can help ensure that services and practices meet the highest global standards in medicine, patient care and confidentiality, as well as access to state of the art tele-medicine equipment, software, facilities and versatility. With the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic, the Oracle Corporation for example was able to modify its hotel management system (OPERA) to assist with converting hotels into hospitals¹⁸, and its programming tool (APEX) was used in screening both people and chemicals¹⁹.

¹⁸ <https://blogs.oracle.com/hospitality/converting-your-hotel-into-a-hospital-we-can-help>

¹⁹ <https://www.oracle.com/uk/corporate/blog/oracle-and-customers-fight-covid-2020-05-05.html>

Appendix I: Guiding Questions to Member States and Stakeholders

For the GFMD Round Table deliberations, member states and other stakeholders are encouraged to focus their discussions and contributions on the practicalities of how to leverage, expand and enhance ever evolving new technologies, to positively and proactively empower migrants of different gender and age groups, from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and circumstances.

Discussants and delegates may address one or more of the guiding questions suggested below (they do not have to address all the questions). The guiding questions below encompass different policy aspects relating to technological solutions for migrants. In addressing the questions, member states and stakeholders are free to focus their interventions on one or more of the migration policy areas addressed in the paper, including access to welfare services, financial inclusion, recruitment and digital livelihoods etc.

- I. **Tech Solutions:** *What are the specific national priorities to expand and enhance tech platforms and services to empower your diaspora, and the migrants in your country? How is your government engaging through international cooperation and partnerships to enhance the livelihood and empowerment of migrants through technological solutions?*
- II. **Partnerships:** *Given the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration in the field of migration-related technology, what are the priority themes for partnerships for your country, organisation or institution?*
- III. **Fair Access:** *To 'leave no one behind' and ensure fair and affordable tech access amongst all migrants and people on the move, what specific priority measures, actions, ventures or programmes are needed in your country or region? To prevent digital divide amongst migrants on a gender basis, what actions and practical frameworks need to be implemented? How would you prevent tech marginalisation of all categories of vulnerable migrants?*
- IV. **Digital Skills:** *Considering that the availability of tech solutions by itself does not guarantee beneficial usage by migrants, what partnerships, measures, actions, ventures or programmes are needed to enhance migrant digital literacy, skills and engagement to leverage and harness the full potential of new technologies? How would you empower migrants in relation to tech entrepreneurship, investment, trade and job creation?*
- V. **Regulation:** *Considering the actual and potential negative aspects of technology in relation to migrants and people on the move, what specific proposals do you have for enlightened national regulation, and responsive regional and international frameworks? What do you consider the regulatory dos and don'ts for the purpose of leveraging new technologies to proactively empower migrants?*

Appendix II: Illustrative Examples of Migration-Related Tech Platforms and Services

(The examples given below are not exhaustive; they illustrate the different types of platforms and services)

I. Labour Migration Management

visadb.io (Poland)	<u>https://visadb.io/about</u>
<i>Internet visa database indexing 300,000 visa, residency and citizenship routes for 200 countries</i>	
e-migrate (UAE/India)	<u>www.emigrate.gov.in</u>
<i>Digital platform used by UAE and Indian governments to manage the deployment of migrant workers, including: job offer reviews; passport checks; employment contract reviews; and visa issuance</i>	
SLBFE Portal (Sri Lanka)	<u>http://www.slbfe.lk/</u>
<i>Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) one-stop portal for services to migrants and recruitment agencies – pre, during and after migration</i>	
POEA (Philippines)	<u>http://www.poea.gov.ph/poeaonline.html</u>
<i>Philippines Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) one-stop portal for services to migrants and recruitment agencies – pre, during and after migration, including adjudications</i>	
Public Authority of Manpower (Kuwait)	<u>www.manpower.gov.kw/Labor-services.html</u>
<i>Portal for recruitment and deployment of migrant workers, including dispute resolution service</i>	
MADAD (India)	<u>www.madad.gov.in/AppConsular/welcomeLink</u>
<i>Grievance resolution mechanism for Indian migrant workers</i>	

II. Migrant and Diaspora Remittances

World Bank (USA)	<u>https://remittanceprices.worldbank.org/en</u>
<i>World Bank's global remittance price comparison website</i>	
RemitSCOPE (IFAD)	<u>www.remitscope.org</u>
<i>Multi-corridor remittance data and market analysis on Africa</i>	
Saver Asia (South East Asia)	<u>https://saverasia.com/</u>
<i>Comparison of fees and foreign exchange rates for remittances within South East Asian countries</i>	
Now Money (UAE)	<u>https://nowmoney.me/</u>
<i>Digital payroll, account and remittance service for low-income workers, migrants and the unbanked</i>	
Valyou (Malaysia)	<u>https://www.valyou.com.my/remittance/</u>
<i>Mobile wallet remittance service operating in several South East Asian countries</i>	
Rise (UAE)	<u>https://www.gorise.co/</u>
<i>Linked services including migrant remittances, bank account, investment, insurance and shopping</i>	
Merchantrade (Malaysia)	<u>https://www.merchantrademoney.com/</u>
<i>Linked services including remittances, bank account, expense tracking, bill payments and insurance</i>	

IME Pay (Nepal)	https://www.imepay.com.np/
<i>Linked services including remittances, bank account, mobile wallet, bill payments and insurance</i>	
Ave Pa'anga Pau (Tonga)	https://www.avepaanga.co.nz/
<i>Service offered by Tonga Development Bank for cheaper online remittance services from Australia and New Zealand, linked to bank accounts</i>	
Vodafone M-Paisa (Fiji)	https://www.vodafone.com.fj/personal/products-services/m-paisa---money-transfer/m-paisa-home-send
<i>First cross-border mobile money remittance service from Australia and New Zealand to Fiji</i>	

III. Migrant Skills Development and Integration

SWADES (India)	http://www.nsdcindia.org/swades/
<i>Skilled Workers Arrival Database for Employment Support – skills platform for migrant workers</i>	
a2i (Bangladesh)	https://a2i.gov.bd/
<i>E-government platform, used to host partner programmes e.g. UNDP enabled livelihood schemes</i>	
Migport (Turkey)	http://migport.com/
<i>Enables refugees to connect anonymously with volunteers who are willing to help them with their daily challenges such as education, finance and bureaucratic processes</i>	
Zaka (UK Registered)	www.zaka.io
<i>Convert physical IDs into digital ID credentials with biometrics; secure credentials to access services</i>	
Tykn (Netherlands Registered)	www.tykn.tech
<i>Protection of personal data for vulnerable populations such as refugees and displaced peoples</i>	
Techfugees (France)	www.techfugees.com
<i>Empower displaced people whilst supporting tech innovations designed by, with and for them</i>	
IOE Seedstars (Switzerland)	https://www.seedstarsworld.com/event/migration-challenge/
<i>Start-up competition for innovative migration-related technological services and business models</i>	
Integreat (Germany)	https://integreat-app.de/en/
<i>Information app for newcomers in Germany, with over 50 governmental partners</i>	
INMI (Chile)	https://inmi.cl/home/
<i>Support for migrant integration and employment; digital matching of migrant workers to employers</i>	
CMSC (Singapore)	www.sgmigrant.com
<i>Covid Migrant Support Coalition platform provides language and other courses, recreation, mental health and wellness services to migrants</i>	
BaLinkBayan (Philippines)	http://www.balinkbayan.gov.ph/
<i>Overseas Filipino's one-stop online portal for diaspora engagement</i>	