

**‘MIGRATION IS NOT A PROBLEM
THAT NEEDS TO BE SOLVED.
IT IS A REALITY THAT NEEDS TO BE MANAGED’**

– *At the beginning of 2021, it was announced that the UN was launching a comprehensive dialogue to improve migration management in Ukraine, particularly with regard to the pressing need for a comprehensive migration management system caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. What measures are planned to achieve this goal and how difficult will it be to implement them?*

– The dialogue was initiated in February 2021 with the launch of the UN Policy Paper on In-Out Migration and the broad consultations held with multiple stakeholders.

As a follow-up action, in April 2021, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) addressed the Cabinet of the Ministers with recommendations on revising and updating the State Migration Policy Strategy of Ukraine and the respective Action Plan. Such an update would be desirable to reflect new migration realities of the country and the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. That said, the process can largely benefit from a close alignment with recent European Union policies on migration, as reflected in the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. Furthermore, it can profit from the alignment with the policy objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) that are also very relevant for the current COVID-19 pandemic response. While many of the GCM objectives are already reflected in Ukrainian legislation, deepening the alignment of national policy objectives further with those of the Compact would simplify the process for Ukraine to become a party to GCM.

The UNCT also advised the Cabinet of Ministers to strengthen inter-agency coordination, including international technical assistance, by establishing an effective mechanism of cooperation with key stakeholders, such as civil society, migrant associations, the private sector, and academia on all issues pertaining to migration governance. The UNCT prepares to start a discussion with the Government of Ukraine to develop a new UN Partnership Framework as the current one concludes at the end of 2022. Migration will be mainstreamed in this new programme of cooperation to ensure that both the UN and the Cabinet of Ministers work together for enhancing the effectiveness of migration management in Ukraine.

In October 2021, Ukraine has completed the Migration Governance Indicators Follow-up Assessment; the latter represents a Government-led process carried out with the support of IOM, aimed at tracking and reporting progress of Ukraine on priorities related to migration governance, since the first assessment that was undertaken in 2018.

– *Nowadays, the rising levels of migration abroad, especially that related to labour, is a serious challenge for Ukraine, causing an outflow of qualified personnel. Moreover, a significant number of migrants leaving our country, often without an intention to repatriate, work without proper permits and with their legal positions unregulated. In your opinion, what are the prospects for resolving this problem, and is it possible to do it in the foreseeable future?*

– IOM, the UN Migration Agency, supports a comprehensive approach to migration management, recognising that migration is ‘not a problem that needs to be solved; it is a reality that needs to be managed’. In Ukraine, a comprehensive approach is required to maximise benefits of out-migration and address new challenges posed by aging workforce, declining population, and growing out-migration.

It is important to look at alternative options to address skills mismatch and labour shortages in different economic sectors and regions of the country, i.e. promoting innovation and developing human capital; reducing skills imbalance and promoting domestic mobility; enabling participation in the labour market of persons previously inactive (i.e. stay-at-home mothers can be encouraged through opening kindergartens); analysing and removing other barriers, including barriers for foreigners’ integration in Ukraine’s labour market. It is crucial to have regular labour market analysis as well as to create training and re-skilling opportunities to address the labour market needs.

Labour migration is not a new trend in Ukraine. The Ukrainian diaspora abroad is large and successful and could potentially advance Ukraine’s transformation agenda contributing through skills, expertise, networks and investments. IOM’s global experience shows that possible temporary return programmes for the diaspora could facilitate skills and knowledge transfer and have a positive impact on the domestic economy.

While migration can potentially spur development, risks related to unsafe migration, unethical recruitment, and even exploitation and trafficking in persons keep growing. Throughout 2020, the IOM Mission in Ukraine identified and assisted in returning 1,680 victims of trafficking (VoTs), who suffered mainly from forced labour. A 25 per cent increase in the number of VoTs was observed compared to the previous year (1,345 VoTs in 2019), marking the highest number of victims ever assisted by IOM Ukraine since the start of its Counter-Trafficking Programme in 1998. The victims were exploited in 25 different countries, including Ukraine.

Men prevailed in the 2020 caseload of trafficking survivors (74 per cent com-

pared to 68 per cent in 2019). An overwhelming majority of victims (97 per cent) identified in 2020 were trafficked for forced labour (93 per cent in 2019) in sectors such as construction, manufacturing, and agriculture. Victims of trafficking are predominantly recruited locally in Ukraine through personal contacts (83 per cent). Other recruitment channels include internet advertisements, unofficial private advertisements, and employment agencies.

These alarming trends as well as the increased vulnerability of the Ukrainian population to irregular migration including trafficking and labour exploitation trigger the need for increased targeted efforts on human trafficking prevention and safe migration promotion for at-risk groups. Awareness of new forms of exploitation, i.e. recruitment for exploitation in criminal activities, should be raised. Supporting community development and economic empowerment for potential and returning migrants can provide alternative livelihood options and prevent people from accepting risky job offers.

– *There is a common view among the creators of political and ideological concepts that the migration process is a natural and completely rational phenomenon, which is not fraught with negative demographic and economic consequences but rather contributes to the formation of healthy multiculturalism, bringing communities together. However, in recent years, against the backdrop of global political and economic crises as well as nationalist rhetoric, the concept of migration has acquired a somewhat disruptive connotation. In your opinion, how can this tendency be reversed, and can the tool of cultural diplomacy serve this purpose? What are the positive aspects of international migration?*

– Indeed, migration is a megatrend of our time; it is a complex phenomenon that has its positive and challenging facets. With the adoption of the Global Compact for Migration, states acknowledged challenges and opportunities of international migration, as well as the shared responsibilities to make it work for all. Well-governed migration brings profound benefits to both receiving and sending countries. Receiving countries get productive workers who fill key gaps in the labour market and help improve their demographic profiles. Sending countries receive billions of dollars in remittances from their overseas workers, attract investment from affluent members of their Diaspora, and leverage the benefits of circular migration when returning migrants bring back their skills, expertise, contacts and personal wealth.

Ukraine has been a country of origin of labour migrants for a long time, however the population of the country is decreasing mainly due to low birth rates. The decrease in the population is accompanied by its ageing. As the economy grows and the demand for labour cannot be matched internally, Ukraine can see negative economic, social, and security impacts for the flow of labour into the country would be drawn even more from the grey sector, if not properly managed or regulated.

Recently, IOM has conducted a research titled ‘Irregular Migrants in Ukraine’. The topic has remained the subject of speculation for many years in the absence

of a solid methodology to estimate the population of irregular migrants in Ukraine. On request of the State Migration Service of Ukraine and with funding from the European Union, IOM has developed and tested a methodology for estimating the total number of irregular migrants staying in the country. The findings of the study revealed that by the end of 2019, the number of irregular migrants in Ukraine was varying between 37,700 to 60,900 persons. Furthermore, the study shed light on the trends of irregular migration, the composition of irregular migrant stock and reasons for irregularity. All this knowledge provides an opportunity for the state authorities of Ukraine to develop more effective responses to irregular migration while ensuring also a better protection for migrants, especially those in a vulnerable position.

The EU-funded IOM-implemented IMMIS project, which was completed in May 2021 and was the biggest ever EU project on migration management in one of the Eastern Partnership countries, helped automate migration management processes, implement modern IT solutions, and align the Ukrainian migration management system with international best practices. These included improving the identification of foreigners using their biometric data and a quick and effective mechanism for information exchange between the governmental actors engaged in migration management.

And of course, there is a need to enhance the potential of culture as a means of achieving prosperity, sustainable development, and global peaceful coexistence. One hundred and sixty-four (164) countries that adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration in 2018 committed to promote mutual respect for the cultures, traditions, and customs of communities of destination and of migrants by exchanging and implementing best practices on integration policies to promote acceptance of diversity and to facilitate social cohesion and inclusion.

The challenging context of the COVID-19 pandemic is having an unprecedented and devastating global impact, afflicting all categories of migrants and their family members. IOM is concerned by the fact that worldwide, despite being fundamental to the pandemic response, migrants as essential workers have been targeted and stigmatised, even falling victim to racist, xenophobic acts and hate crimes. In such a context, acceptance of cultural diversity is crucial for helping migrants and host communities to better know and understand each other, overcome stereotypes, counter fear and hate, and remain healthy.

Ukraine has made a clear commitment to promoting cultural diversity as an essential element for dialogue within the Ukrainian society and for national development. The State Migration Policy Strategy of Ukraine for the period until 2025 envisages adherence to cultural diversity and fulfilment of cultural needs of immigrant communities in Ukraine as well as support to the cultural needs of Ukrainian communities abroad. The National Human Rights Strategy of Ukraine adopted in March 2021 aims to ensure the observance and imple-

mentation of the principle of non-discrimination in all spheres of social life by central and local government bodies, as well as respect for cultural diversity. The strategy stipulates ensuring conditions for the development of ethnic, cultural, language, and religious diversity of all the indigenous communities and national minorities and supports intercultural dialogue.

– *What does the effective management of labour migration imply, in the context of Ukraine in particular?*

– A cohesive, whole-of-government approach to migration policy development and management would enhance inter-agency coordination of migration in Ukraine, serving to maximise the benefits of migration for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and minimise its negative outcomes. The dialogue between Ukraine and the EU on the implementation of the Association Agreement places a focus on mobility as one of the priority areas for cooperation. As migration is a cross-cutting issue with relevance to many policy domains, the coordination mechanisms should be operational and include as wide a circle of actors as possible.

COVID-19 has shed light on and further exacerbated systemic issues that require careful consideration as mobility gradually restores. This presents an opportunity to strengthen the framework for labour migration management in Ukraine through bilateral and multilateral cooperation and experience sharing with key destination countries. The common goal is enhancing the coherence of government approaches to migration that would consequently strengthen the protection of Ukrainian migrant workers' rights and safety from the time of recruitment to the moment they return home.

It also should be highlighted that migration is frequently perceived as a threat in Ukrainian society and efforts are put to reverse the trend, with no evident success. Instead, it is recommended to reverse the negative narrative about migration and approach it in a balanced way identifying opportunities and risks and ways to address them. The capacity development activities and information sessions on migration for officials from different levels and entities of the government would build a common platform to effectively communicate about migration and to amplify the credible voices that could shape the attitudes to migrants and the rhetoric around the migration topic as well as influence migration policies and programmes. Mechanisms for dialogue and communication should be further strengthened and include civil society, the international community, the private sector, academia, migrant and diaspora groups. This would help to achieve a more unified approach and a common understanding of the key migration issues, as well as raise awareness of the linkages between migration and other policy domains.

– *According to a study by the International Organization for Migration, 21 percent of Ukrainian migrant workers are interested in investing in business and development projects in Ukraine. Does it provide benefits for the Ukrainian economy? How does the mission promote such initiatives?*

– Migrants are the biggest investors in Ukraine’s economy – estimated remittance inflows in 2019 were \$15.8 billion or 10.2 percent of Ukraine’s GDP, which was more than foreign direct investment (\$5.1 billion), official development assistance (\$1.15 billion), and portfolio investment (\$5.8 billion) combined. Last year, according to the World Bank, the volume of remittances dropped to \$13.7 billion (a decline of 13.2 per cent compared to 2019) but remained crucial for Ukrainian households and the economy.

At the same time, an effective mechanism is needed to channel remittances and savings to not only alleviate poverty through increased consumption but also to advance socioeconomic development through productive investment. In the longer term, professional and skills networks that develop through labour mobility can further stimulate productivity and growth.

In 2019, through funding from USAID, IOM Ukraine started the implementation of the 1+1 Initiative supporting communities prone to economically induced outward migration, migrant workers and their families with co-funding for the creation and development of businesses. For each dollar of their own funds invested in developing their business in Ukraine, participants receive another dollar as a non-refundable grant for the purchase of equipment. In general, the programme provides equipment worth up to \$ 4,000. The same principle is applied to support communities prone to economically induced outward migration, to expand economic opportunities, improve social services, and induce jobs creation. As of mid-2021, IOM has co-funded a dozen of community development projects amounting up to \$20,000 under the similar 1+1 principle.

Recognising the potential of diaspora and migrant engagement, in 2019, IOM invested through the IOM Development Fund (IDF) and partnered with PricewaterhouseCoopers to conduct a feasibility study and identify an efficient mechanism for migrants and diaspora to transfer and invest their financial resources in Ukraine. We suggested that transnational communities’ investment could serve as an alternative source of financing for Ukrainian entrepreneurs with development needs, thus enhancing access to affordable financing in Ukraine, particularly for micro- and small enterprises.

– *What challenges have you been confronted with in your activities due to the quarantine restrictions?*

As all humanitarian and development actors in Ukraine, we have had to adapt to new working modalities, moving most of our activities online. It was a challenge indeed, however, we did our utmost to ensure that in 2020 planned assistance reached over 83,000 migrants, internally displaced persons, and members of conflict-affected communities safely and without delays.

The data used in this interview were last updated in October 2021