I. Organizational arrangements

The Workshop on “Strengthening Dialogue to make migration work for development in Asia and Western Asia” will take place from 28 to 30 June 2011 at United Nations House in Beirut. It is jointly organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

II. Participation

The Workshop is expected to be attended by key stakeholders related to International Migration and Development from countries of origin and destination of migrants in the Western Asian and the Asia-Pacific Region and independent experts. Stakeholders could be government officials from Ministries involved with migration and development planning, such as Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Overseas Employment, Ministry of Social Welfare and others as well as Associations of Private Recruitment Agencies, Migrant’s Welfare Funds, Labour Attaches and Migrant Associations as well as relevant international organizations.

III. Countries and territories to be covered:

(1) From ESCAP region: Bangladesh; India; Indonesia; Nepal; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Sri Lanka; Singapore

(2) From the ESCWA region: Bahrain; Jordan; Kuwait; Lebanon; Oman; Qatar; Syrian Arab Republic; United Arab Emirates
IV. Expected outcome of the Workshop

Participants will have increased understanding of the issues related to managing labour migration from the perspectives of countries of origin and destination and increased understanding of policy options that could be taken to manage international migration to maximize its positive impact on development while protecting migrant workers. As an outcome of the Workshop, it is expected that experts will develop a set of recommendations to address some of the key issues related to international migration and development in the Western Asian and Asian region. These recommendations could feed into international consultative processes such as the Abu Dhabi Dialogue and the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) 2011, which will be held as a series of decentralized, smaller meetings. The papers presented and the discussions will also form the basis of an inter-regional study on migration and development.

V. Overall background of the Workshop

International migration is increasingly being considered as a tool for economic and social development. Issues like intra- and inter-regional migration trends; magnitude and dynamics of remittances; participation of women and its impact on gender equality; and migration of qualified workers were considered as priority matters during the United Nations High Level Dialogue (HLD) on International Migration and Development (September 2006).

As a follow-up to the HLD, the Regional Commissions of the United Nations and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) are implementing a joint inter-regional project on “Strengthening national capacities to deal with international migration: Maximizing development benefits and minimizing negative impact”. The inter-regional project aims at identifying both the commonalities of international migration across the world's five regions (Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Asia) and the region-specific relevant characteristics. Regional Commissions have already conducted regional workshops in order to identify issues pertinent to each region. Given the importance of migration from Asia-Pacific to Western Asia, the present workshop will focus on issues related to international migration and development in both regions. The recommendations of the Workshop will contribute to an inter-regional study, which will be published at the conclusion of the project.

VI. Format of the Workshop

The Workshop will use a mix of methods and modalities, among them Secretariat presentations and the presentations of independent and country experts.

Session 5 on “Sharing national experiences and good practices related to the management of international migration and the protection of migrants” will take the form of a Panel Discussion and will be concluded with the presentation of the findings from the perspective of both sending and receiving countries.

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1 This document uses the terms “migrant” as a synonym for “expatriate worker” and “temporary contractual worker”.

Session 6 will be in the form of working groups for “preparing the agenda for future interregional dialogue”. Two working groups will be formed: one discussing the findings of the Workshop, the other focusing on its recommendations. Then, the results of these working group discussions will be presented for adoption in the Concluding Session of the Workshop.

VII. Background on substantive issues to be addressed

The accelerating integration of the global economy has stimulated an increase in the volume and types of international migration. Migration has a significant impact on economic and social change both in countries of origin and in host countries.

Migration in Western Asia and Asia-Pacific has undergone dynamic changes in recent decades. While historically there have always been linkages, especially through trade, between Asia-Pacific and Western Asia, these linkages have increased since the 1970s through international migration. Migration from South and South-East Asia to Western Asia has become one of the major migration corridors in the world. Based on migrant stock figures from the United Nations Population Division, it can be estimated that there were some 10 million Asian migrant workers in the GCC countries in 2010. The global economic crisis is not likely to have halted the increase in these flows, since its effects on the ESCWA region as a whole were rather limited.

Within these flows, certain trends can be observed. One major trend is the fast growth in officially deployed migrant workers from Asia-Pacific to Western Asia. Another trend is that more countries in Asia have started officially deploying migrant workers, thereby increasing competition between deploying countries and decreasing their bargaining power. Thirdly, although the majority of migrants in Western Asia are still men, an increasing number of women are migrating to work in Western Asia, mainly as domestic workers.

This extremely intense migration has reshaped the economies and societies of countries of origin and destination. Many migrant-receiving countries, especially in the GCC countries, have benefited from it: large-scale immigration to these countries is generally credited with providing the labour force and expertise to effectively exploit the natural resource base of these countries. However, concerns have grown as countries of destination face high levels of unemployment among their nationals, and some countries are faced with the almost-unique situation of their nationals being minorities, and in some cases virtually-absent from private sector labour forces. Managing these migrant inflows to complement skills and labour force shortages while increasing the employment of nationals in the private sector has therefore become a major challenge for these countries.

In the countries of origin, meanwhile, remittances from ESCWA countries help keep current account deficits under control and have reduced household poverty. In Pakistan, for example, almost 20 per cent of the almost USD 6.5 billion received in remittances in

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2007-8 came from Saudi Arabia alone.\(^3\) However, these remittances have a social cost, starting from the often high recruitment cost which has to be borne by the migrants themselves, and including the issues raised by the separation of families, and children and older persons left behind without an adequate caretaker.

There is thus value in incorporating migration into national development plans – for countries of origin and destination. Although this process is only in its early stages, there is great benefit in bringing together countries to share their experiences in mainstreaming migration into their development strategies, and in managing migration more generally. For example, while some countries of origin already have comprehensive policies in place, other countries that have only recently started to actively deploy workers could benefit from other countries’ experience. Meanwhile, countries of destination could learn from one another’s immigration systems with a view to reforming them to meet development and protection goals. Such dialogue can also promote mutual comprehension of the positions of countries of origin and destination.

ESCWA and ESCAP countries have engaged in broad, informal and non-binding dialogue through Regional Consultative Processes such as the Abu Dhabi Dialogue between Asian countries of origin and GCC countries of destination. In the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, areas such as data and information, protection of migrant workers, and managing migration have been identified as key areas for cooperation. The Workshop will therefore build on results of earlier workshops and meetings and will further continue the dialogue. Recommendations at the Workshop can further feed into the further consultative processes.

**VIII. Substantive issues to be addressed at the Workshop**

- **Mainstreaming migration into development.** In order to benefit from the positive impacts and minimize the negative effects of migration for development, it is particularly important to mainstream migration into development strategies. This involves taking into account not only the impacts but the nature of migration, both inward and outward, as well as existing cooperation between countries of origin and destination in order to meet their goals.

**Managing labour migration**

- **Schemes to manage temporary labour migration:** A key particularity of labour migration to Western Asia is that contracts for labour migrants are temporary with few opportunities to settle permanently and family reunification only being allowed for high income categories. A key modality to manage inflows of migrant workers applied by countries in the GCC is the sponsorship (\textit{kafala}) system, a system where the residence and work permit is tied to a certain sponsor who is responsible for the migrant. This however has often led to irregularities and abuses, and poses a burden to employers as well as migrants. These difficulties have led for example to Bahrain having reformed the sponsorship system, with Kuwait in the process of following suit, and Qatar considering a similar course of action. As most Asian workers are of the low- and semi-skilled categories, Asian migrant workers usually migrate without their

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families. Despite these measures, however, many migrants find ways to stay in the country for long periods. Several countries and territories of Asia have also become countries of destination of migrants, due to labour shortages in these countries. They have looked to find ways to effectively manage permanent immigration as well as temporary labour migration while at the same time providing some protection and rights to the migrants. Exchange of information and experiences of reform between different countries of destination and origin could contribute to enhancing the awareness of policymakers on different options on managing migration inflows while at the same time protecting migrant workers and national culture and interest. This could potentially provide a model for other countries looking to reform their immigration systems.

- **Costs of migration** In many sending countries in Asia, recruitment is often done through private recruitment agencies, who charge a fee to the migrants and in some cases also to the employers. Recruitment charged to the migrants varies in different countries of origin, ranging from a period of one to three months’ salary, or even up to one year salary. As a consequence, migrants or their families find themselves having to pay back substantial debts before being able to benefit from the increased wages brought by migration. In order to facilitate the migration process, there is a need to further scrutinize recruitment costs charged to migrants and employers, how these may be paid and to discuss ways to regulate recruitment agencies in countries of origin and destination.

- **Migration for domestic work.** Migration for domestic work has become an increasing feature of international migration flows within Asia and from Asia to Western Asia. In Kuwait alone, there are over 660,000 migrant domestic workers. The nature of their work in private households, often outside the scope of labour laws, and dependent on their employers for their legal status within the country, places them in a vulnerable position, leading to concerns as to how legal systems can be reformed to better-ensure their protection. In Asia, Singapore and Hong Kong, China have a special type of work permit for domestic helpers, which enables the participation of local women in the workforce. Civil Society Organizations in these countries also play an important role in the protection and empowerment of domestic helpers. The workshop will be a forum for discussion on this issue and steps countries of origin and destination can take to ensure migrant domestic worker’s protection. Yet, migration for domestic work has been increasing, in spite of the often difficult working conditions. There is a need to assess the migratory experience of domestic workers and its social impacts with a view of finding ways to address issues specific to migrant domestic workers.

- **Bilateral migration regulation.** A number of countries have been actively engaged in collaboratively facilitating and managing international labour migration outflows. Migration is in most cases managed through bi-lateral Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). For example, India has signed MoUs with Bahrain and Kuwait, while Indonesia has negotiated MoUs with Jordan, Kuwait, the UAE, and Qatar. However, it has been noted that these MoUs could be strengthened in order to ensure that their provisions are properly implemented.

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4 Human Rights Watch, *Walls At Every Turn* (2010), p. 2
5 IOM (2010), *Labour Migration from Indonesia*, p. 16
Regional Cooperation

- **Regional Consultative Processes.** ESCWA and ESCAP countries have also engaged in broad, informal and non-binding dialogue through Regional Consultative Processes such as the Abu Dhabi Dialogue between Asian countries of origin and GCC countries of destination. In the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, areas such as data and information, protection of migrant workers, and managing migration have been identified as key areas for cooperation. The Workshop will therefore build on results of earlier workshops and meetings and will further continue the dialogue. Recommendations at the Workshop will further feed into further consultative processes.

- **Data.** While labour deploying countries in most cases collect, analyze and publish detailed data from administrative records on labour migrant outflows, in most cases disaggregated by country of destination and in many cases also by sex and skill category, data on migrant stocks and inflows is not publicly available in the countries of destination in Western Asia. However, accurate data is a key requirement to draft evidence-based policies. In the migrant-sending countries, data on return migrants and their re-integration in the country of origin is still inadequate.

Migrants’ Civil and Social Rights

- **Migrant protection.** Given the scale and nature of migration to ESCWA countries, ESCAP countries of origin are concerned about the protection of migrant workers. In recognition of this, the Abu Dhabi Declaration identified “[p]reventing illegal recruitment practices and promoting welfare and protection measures for contractual workers, supportive of their well being and preventing their exploitation at origin and destination” as a priority area for partnership between Asian countries of origin and Arab countries of destination. While most countries in the Western Asian region have national labour legislation in place, this usually does not extend to domestic work. Moreover, there are implementation gaps in existing legislation. However, countries of destination in the ESCWA region have shown that they are interested in learning from good reform practices from other countries. This meeting can be a forum for such exchange of good practices.

- **Migrant associations.** At the same time, migrant associations and the contacts between migrants themselves, especially women migrants, play an important role for self-help and counselling for migrant workers enabling them to attain their rights under the laws of the countries of destination. Studies in different countries of destination of migrants in Asia have shown that migrants have received important guidance and empowerment through belonging to a network of migrant workers, whether formal or informal. This would call for improved services to the migrants in the country of destination which could be provided by local or migrant non-governmental organizations, or through the Embassies of the country of origin.

- **Social Protection.** Where relevant, migrants may have contributed to social protection systems in their countries of origin and destination, entitling them to access certain social services in their countries of destination. However, when migrants return, in the absence of bilateral agreements on the portability of these benefits, migrants may find themselves ineligible to receive services in either country, potentially leading to negative development outcomes or re-emigration. While bilateral memoranda of
understanding (MoUs) exist between various Asian countries of origin and Arab countries of destination, for example between India and Bahrain and Kuwait, or Indonesia and Jordan, Kuwait, the UAE, and Qatar, this forum will be a springboard for discussion as to how portability of social benefits could be built into these MoUs, strengthening them.

IX. Draft agenda:

Given the areas outlined above, the following sessions are proposed to form the basis of a draft agenda:

(1) Opening of the Workshop.
(2) Key trends and challenges related to international migration and development.
(3) Managing international migration while protecting migrants.
(4) Assessing migration from a gender perspective.
(5) Sharing national experiences and good practices related to the management of international migration and the protection of migrants. (Panel Discussion)
(6) Working groups: preparing the agenda for future interregional dialogue.
(7) Final conclusions and recommendations.

X. Background studies to be undertaken

The Workshop could draw from existing reports and research studies, for example those that have served as inputs to the regional workshops under the same project, as well as new targeted papers, as follows:

- Outline of migration between countries of the ESCAP and ESCWA Regions.
- The United Nations Development Account Project on International Migration: An overview of the main findings from the Latin American and Caribbean Region.
- The United Nations Development Account Project on International Migration: An overview of the main findings from the ESCWA Region.
- The United Nations Development Account Project on International Migration: An overview of the main findings from the ESCAP Region.
- The relationship between migration, development, and social protection.
- Protection of the rights of migrant workers from South Asia: key issues.
- The implications of the recent reform of the sponsorship system: challenges and opportunities.

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6 IOM (2010), Labour Migration from Indonesia, p. 16
• Challenges related to managing migration in countries of origin: The case of recruitment cost in Bangladesh.

• The role of Civil Society in providing protection to migrant workers.

• The situation of female workers from ESCAP countries in vulnerable sectors of the economy in the GCC, Jordan and Lebanon.

• The migratory experience of returned migrant domestic workers: the example of Indonesia.