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2024 CARAM Asia International Migrants Day Statement

Building an Equitable Future for Migrants: Rights, Recognition and Resilience

As we commemorate the 2024 International Migrants Day (IMD), we call on governments in both sending and receiving countries to recognize the contributions of migrant workers (MWs). MWs are essential drivers of global development, fueling economic growth, addressing critical labor market gaps, sharing learning and experiences, and enriching cultures. In 2020, the global population of international migrants reached 281 million, with 187 million categorized as labor migrants. Notably, the feminization of labor migration is on the rise, with women now accounting for approximately 48.1% of international migrants in 2020ⁱ. Among these, 83 million hailed from the Asian region, contributing an impressive \$309 billion in remittances in 2022ⁱⁱ. This influx of funds has significantly boosted the GDPs of countries like Nepal, Philippines, and Bangladesh. These remittances support education, healthcare, housing, and transforming communities. In receiving countries, MWs fill labor shortages, particularly in "3D jobs" (dirty, difficult, and dangerous), while also promoting cultural exchange and strengthening democratic engagement through diaspora participation.

The 2024 theme, "*Honoring the Contributions of Migrants and Respecting Their Rights*", emphasizes the far-reaching impact of migrant contributions across sectors and borders, while also addressing the challenges and exploitation MWs experience during their migration cycle. It is crucial for governments and other stakeholders to recognize that despite invaluable contributions, to date, MWs continue to face significant challenges at pre-departure stage to post-arrival in receiving countries and in reintegration stage in sending countries that violate human, labor and health rights, which include:

1. **Exploitation and Labour Rights Violations:** MWs are particularly vulnerable to exploitation such as fraud, bribes, and forced labor. Women migrant domestic workers, for example, are disproportionately affected, enduring severe labor rights violations. These include working long hours without guaranteed days off, wage theft, unfair working conditions, and lack of legal protection against physical and sexual abuse. Furthermore, many MWs are trapped under restrictive sponsorship systems that prevent them from changing employers, even in cases of exploitation. A significant number of MWs become undocumented due to employers' negligence

in renewing work permits. Others are brought into receiving countries by unlicensed recruiters using fake documents or for non-existent jobs, leaving them stranded. Some enter in receiving countries on student or tourist visas under false promises of obtaining work permits, only to face legal and financial instability. This increases their vulnerability to arrest, deportation, and exploitation, while depriving them of essential rights and protections.

2. **Health Access Barriers:** MWs continuously face exclusion from healthcare services, due to extremely high out of pocket health care cost in public hospitals, they have limited or no insurance and compensation for work-related injuries. Undocumented MWs avoid entering public health care services due to fear of arrest, detention and deportation. In addition, MWs are subjected to involuntary health testing for employment requirements and criminalized (i.e. arrest, detention, and deportation) for health-related conditions which can be treated. These discriminatory policies and practices violate their human and health rights, as access to healthcare should be voluntary and based on universal health coverage principles. In many receiving countries, strict health screening procedures, including mandatory HIV testing and pregnancy tests for women migrant workers, are enforced as part of the work permit process at pre-departure stage, upon arrival and at the time of work permit renewal. Those who are found to be HIV positive or pregnant face a heightened risk of job termination, possible unsafe abortion, and most often result in forced deportation and/or criminalization.
3. **Social and Economic Marginalization:** Xenophobia, discrimination, and limited integration into receiving communities exacerbate their challenges for social cohesion and cultural exchange, further restricting access to resources, services, and decision-making processes that are crucial to ensure their meaningful participation at the grassroots level. Social support mechanisms are also not in place and MWs suffer from isolation and exclusion.
4. **Migration Policy Gaps and Implementation Failures:** The discriminatory nature of policies and inability to protect MWs' labor and health rights restricts migrants' access to essential healthcare, legal services, and other interventions. Issues like wage theft, recruitment fraud, and inadequate social protections, especially for women MWs under systems like Kafala, persist.

Despite progress in migration policies in some Asian countries, inconsistencies and implementation gaps persist, particularly in informal sectors such as domestic work, among undocumented MWs, and in addressing gender-based protections. Migrant workers continue to endure human, labor, and health rights violations in receiving countries to support their families back home, often relying on non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community networks, and advocacy groups for legal aid, healthcare, and other supports. The spirit of IMD calls for a renewed commitment to addressing the needs of migrants worldwide especially in the context of labour migrants in Asian region. Honoring migrants' contributions requires addressing migration challenges through concrete actions. CARAM Asia, along with its 42 member organizations across 18 countries in Asia, urges decisive action from the governments of both sending and receiving countries to create a future where migration is safe and equitable, with the following recommendations;

1. **Strengthen Legal Frameworks:** Governments should revise outdated migration policies to include labor, health, and human rights protections, addressing the evolving needs of MWs, with gender-responsive measures, and ensuring effective monitoring and enforcement.
2. **Ratify International Instruments:** Sending and receiving countries should ratify and enforce conventions like the International Convention on Migrant Workers' Rights to guarantee fair treatment and equal protection for migrants.
3. **Promote Healthcare Access:** Governments should eliminate discriminatory health policies, remove criminalization based on health and documentation status, and ensure MWs can access healthcare at local rates.
4. **Combat Human Trafficking:** Sending and receiving countries should work together to enhance regional cooperation to dismantle trafficking networks while ensuring victims are protected without criminalizing their legal status.
5. **Facilitate Integration:** Sending countries should establish social inclusion and reintegration pathways to support MWs' resilience, both in receiving countries and upon their return home regardless of their status.

CARAM Asia (Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility) remains committed to advocating for the health and rights of migrant communities. Through evidence-based interventions, policy advocacy, and regional cooperation, we aim to create a future where MWs can live with dignity, free from stigma and discrimination.

Statement issued by:

CARAM Asia Secretariat, Member Organizations and Migrant Workers' Right Task Force.

Best regards,



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ⁱ<https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/what-we-do/world-migration-report-2024-chapter-6/current-context-feminization-migration-growing-global-gender-gap-migration>.

ⁱⁱ<https://publications.iom.int/books/asia-pacific-migration-data-report-2022>.