

13th Summit of the Global Forum on Migration and Development
18-26 January 2021
United Arab Emirates
VIRTUAL

BUSINESS PARTICIPATION SUMMARY REPORT

I. 13th GFMD Summit

The 13th Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) Summit took place virtually from 18-26 January under the chairmanship of the government of the United Arab Emirates. The theme was **“The future of human mobility: innovative partnerships for sustainable development”**. The Business Advisory Group on Migration, coordinated by the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), designed an online program dedicated to the impact of migration policies on businesses, with a view to strengthening the dialogue between businesses and governments on business priorities linked to skills mobility, responsible recruitment and regular migration pathways, in the post Covid-19 economic recovery process.

For the fifth consecutive occasion, IOE through the Business Advisory Group on Migration, championed active business representation during the GFMD Summit which brought together more than two thousand registered participants worldwide. 160 representatives of companies and employers' organisations registered and engaged in multilateral discussions on migration during the Summit. Business speakers had 37 formal speaking roles in different government-led plenaries, as well as side events, showcasing their strong presence and engagement.

In the preparatory phase leading up to the Summit, the UAE hosted six regional online roundtables between March and July 2021. Employers actively participated in all sessions, which addressed the following topics: governance of labour migration, skilling migrants for employment, leveraging technologies to empower migrants, addressing gaps in migrant protection, discussing approaches to address irregular migration and fostering partnerships to realise migration related goals.

Through the whole process, employers addressed policy gaps highlighted by the Covid-19 crisis, which urgently needed solutions. Focus was placed on the need for improved regulatory frameworks for skills mobility and responsible recruitment, as well as the alignment of skills and migration policies as a comprehensive response to migration challenges.

The first ever virtual GFMD Summit was successfully organised by the UAE. It provided smooth connectivity and systems which helped seamless holding of various sessions. The attempt to cater to all the different time zones were navigated in the best possible manner. However, the late finalisation of time slots and programme created administrative and organisational challenges to the different stakeholders in securing speakers and participants. This challenge was compounded due to the summit being held in January, as much organisational time was lost during the Christmas break.

II. Six Business Networking Regional dialogues

Regional dialogues for Africa (English and French), Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and Europe were organized on Thursday, 21 January. This networking space was structured as six *regional dialogues* exclusively for private sector's delegates to exchange directly and informally with the governments from their region, under Chatham House rules. The focus was on solutions for migration-related consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and provided a platform for employers to present the business case for well-regulated migration policies in times of crisis, recovery and beyond.

The regional dialogues on business and government networking attracted over 136 participants from governments and business delegations from 61 countries. Discussions were organised around two focus questions: *What are two key solutions for the hardest challenges to migration in the time of Covid-19 in your country or region? How can businesses and governments collaborate concretely on solutions to recover from Covid-19 in your country or region?*

Discussions on each roundtable was led by leading employers' organisations from the region, as well as global businesses. Discussants elaborated on the challenges faced in accessing skills, moving skills across borders during the pandemic, difficulties in retaining talent due to border closures. Businesses emphasized the need for public-private partnerships at the regional level, to facilitate access to skills and skills recognition processes to meet labour shortages in specific fields.

Employers shared lessons learned and proposed recommendations to the governments on possible successful regulations and solutions adapted to today's realities. All six regions expressed strong support for advanced use of data management to improve cross border migration, contact tracing, intra-company migration procedures and improved legal pathways for labour migration.

Employers stated that the consequences of the pandemic highlighted skills gaps in labour market and migration governance. They urged governments to consider digitizing procedures for work permits applications, visa extensions and recruitment processes, in order to create more accessible, transparent and less bureaucratic systems.

III. "The Business Case and Common Ground" plenaries

During the three-hour prime time slot of the GFMD on the 22nd of January, the Business Advisory Group on Migration hosted two high-level Davos style plenaries. These plenaries were open to the public and brought together speakers from governments, businesses and mayoral stakeholders. During the opening session of the Business plenaries, IOE Secretary-General Roberto Suarez Santos stressed the importance of the engagement of stakeholders to work towards solutions during troubling economic times.

Mr. Santos reiterated the call for efficient and transparent legal frameworks for migration with increased use of digital technology. He highlighted that the activities of the Business Advisory Group on migration held in 2020 were strategic and forward looking, like the [Asian Declaration](#), innovative solutions driven start-up tech competition, the engagement with national migration focal points in national Employers' Organisations across regions, and a number of collaborative engagements with international partners on migration and development processes.

During the Business Plenaries, panelists from employers' federations, businesses and governments shared their perspectives on the challenges arising in labour markets, as governments took measures to control the spread of the pandemic. Panelists focused on solutions to fostering legal migration pathways that were key to post-pandemic recovery and rejuvenation. They also shared their perspectives on common grounds for different stakeholders to work together in order to #buildforwardbetter.

Experiences shared from the Philippines, Switzerland and France, as well as from global companies, underscored the importance of public-private dialogue to manage and improve more predictable and innovative frameworks for skills mobility. This would help to fill the much-needed skills shortages to support economic recovery during and after the pandemic.

Panelists also emphasized the need to maintain and improve regular migration pathways, to ensure that the Covid-19 crisis does not reverse the progress attained. Discussions and floor interventions also stressed the need to support and promote fair and responsible recruitment practices, which would prevent illegal migration, to develop and recognize skills and the transfer of skills, and to match talents to work where and when it is needed.

As businesses contribute to a significant share of global employment, it is commendable that governments respond with stimulus packages designed to help businesses, in particular SME's affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. This encouragement to keep employees at work and businesses open will support the foundations for more resilient economic recovery.

The business-led 2021 regional workshops presented the recommendations outlined below, along with the Asian Declaration paper. The Business Advisory Group on Migration was congratulated for tabling the recommendations, as they represented the footprint of business in the migration landscape, as well as a source of future collaboration and partnerships going forward.

Recommendations:

1. Stronger engagement with the private sector in developing and amending migration policies.
2. Enhanced public-private cooperation at the regional level.
3. Improved transparency and whole of government coordination.
4. Improved legal pathways for employment.
5. Better leveraging of technology for enhanced migration management.
6. Adoption and implementation of responsible recruitment policies and practices.

IV. IOE-Seedstars Migration Challenge Competition

Start-up competition: During the prime-time slot of the business meetings at the GFMD Summit on the 22nd of January, IOE Secretary-General Mr Roberto Suarez Santos launched the global Migration Challenge Competition, where 18 start-up finalists presented their business pitches. IOE had launched the second Migration Challenge program in partnership with Seedstars, a Swiss start-up incubator, and with financial support from the Swiss Development and Cooperation. The competition was launched in recognition of the importance leveraging technology to find innovative solutions to the different challenges in labour migration processes.

Eighteen tech start-ups represented by innovative business entrepreneurs from around the world attended the virtual GFMD Summit. The Migration Challenge competition had received ninety-nine completed applications, and only a select group of eighteen were shortlisted to present at the GFMD. The business models focused on education technologies (EdTech), financial technologies (Fintech), human resources, artificial intelligence annotation tools and visa processes. Detailed information on the program and past winners can be found on the website of the [Migration Challenge competition](#).

Training – 6 January: The start-ups benefited from a day-long online training on the “Art of Pitching” that focused on pitching, investments and networking. Mentors worked with the start-ups to help them to develop their presentation pitches, to tap into their talents to grow their networks and business models. This support is in line with the ethos of IOE, which strongly believes in empowering young entrepreneurs with tools to help them strive in their business endeavours.

During the GFMD, start-ups had access to all open roundtable meetings and consultations, in order to connect to business representatives and government officials to present their tech products. Consultations with some of the start-ups revealed that they were able to generate business interest of possible investments and partnerships. Finalists included CorvusHealth, a start-up which works to train, certify and match health care talent from the African continent to Europe; C-Wallet, a fintech start-up on remittances and finances; and Hirefreehands, a start-up that trains and connects African IT talent remotely to fill skills shortages in developed countries.

Pitching – 22 January: During the “Business Plenary on Common Ground”, two sessions of nine (9) start-up pitches each were presented to about 200 online viewers. The eighteen (18) start-ups pitched for two minutes each and took questions from the jury panel. The jury panel comprised of four (4) members which included:

1. Mr. Harshvendra Soin (Global Chief People Officer and Head Marketing at Tech Mahindra)
2. Mr. Konstantin Hapkemeyer (Investment Associate at Seedstars)
3. Ms. Valentina Primo (Founder and CEO at Start-up without Borders)
4. Ms. Lisa La Bonte (CEO at Arab Youth Venture Foundation)

The winners were announced on the 25th of January, during the prime-time session of Open Space for Migration and Development Partnerships. The representative of Swiss Development and Cooperation, Ms. Bettina Etter, announced the winner. Roberto Suarez Santos, Secretary General of the IOE, hosted a live follow-up question and answers session with the winner and the two runners-up of the Migration Challenge 2021.

The recipients were:

- Winner: [DignifAI](#) from Colombia
- First runner-up: [CasparCoding](#) from Nigeria
- Second runner-up: [LaowaiCareer Int.](#) from China

Recordings of the eighteen start-up [finalist pitches](#) and the [winner announcement](#) video are available on IOE YouTube channel.

The concluding remarks for the Open Space for Migration and Development Partnerships session was delivered by the Chair of the 13th GFMD, H.E. Nasser bin Thani Al Hamli, Minister of Human Resources and Emiratization of the UAE. The Minister emphasized the importance of bringing the digital innovation and technological enablers to the GFMD sessions, and to continue efforts to find solutions that contribute to improving labour migration governance.

V. Conclusion and next steps

Despite the online format which prevented face-to-face interactions, the 13th GFMD brought positive outcomes and furthered engagement among stakeholders. The engagement of the private sector and its visibility at the virtual Summit was well noted and appreciated in different sessions and in the roundtable discussions. In addition to dozens of formal speaking roles in different government led discussions and events, the Business Advisory Group on Migration contributed with both written and oral inputs in the roundtable discussions and made active interventions from the floor and in ad-hoc meetings.

The private sector participated successfully during the Summit, both in terms of the quantity and quality of its engagement. It was able to highlight to stakeholders that it had a concrete role to play in supporting Governments in effectively managing migration and was willing to contribute to the policy debate at the local and global level.

A positive and measurable outcome of the Summit was the increased demand for private sector participation and collaboration from governments, mayoral mechanism and international organisations. With France set to take over the chairmanship of the GFMD in 2022, the current Troika, composed of Ecuador, UAE and France is expected to ensure the continued value-addition and positive impact of the Forum. In this context, the Business Advisory Group on Migration will continue to organise the much-needed voice of business, to ensure its continued impact in the GFMD and beyond.