

# CIVIL SOCIETY REPORT

THE GLOBAL FORUM ON MIGRATION AND  
DEVELOPMENT (GFMD)

THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)  
CHAIRMANSHIP

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“BUILDING FORWARD TOGETHER:  
CIVIL SOCIETY PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS AT THE  
END OF THE GFMD 2020 CHAIRMANSHIP.”



Global Forum on  
**MIGRATION & DEVELOPMENT**

*CIVIL SOCIETY - UAE 2020*



## GFMD Civil Society 2020: Resources

- ❖ [2020 GFMD Regional Consultations and 2020 six thematic priorities](#)
- ❖ [2020 GFMD Civil Society Preparatory Meeting](#)
- ❖ [Civil society Participation in the 13th GFMD Summit](#)
- ❖ [GFMD reference documents \(GFMD Official website\)](#)
- ❖ [Information on the GFMD Summit](#)

## Acronyms

<b>GFMD</b>	Global Forum on Migration and Development
<b>CSPM</b>	Civil Society Preparatory Meeting
<b>UAE</b>	United Arab Emirates

# Civil Society Report<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by the International Catholic Migration Commission, in its capacity as GFMD Civil Society Coordination Office

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Civil Society in the GFMD 2020

Through a year of unprecedented turmoil and in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 13<sup>th</sup> GFMD year-long process held under the Chairmanship of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) brought together **the GFMD community in a crucial moment for international migration**, as governments, civil society, business leaders, local authorities, and youth representatives, came together virtually throughout 2020. This culminated with the GFMD Summit at the end of a year of GFMD activities, which provided the **space for essential multi-stakeholder discussions on the response to COVID-19 and other urgent global migration issues**. Throughout the range of sessions, all participants recognized the unique character and relevance of the GFMD as creating a conducive environment for a constructive dialogue geared towards true partnerships and collective solutions – even more so in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. GFMD participants restated the **responsibility of the GFMD to provide a strong international leadership** in responding to the COVID-19 health crisis and its social and economic consequences on migrants and societies.

For Civil Society, the 13<sup>th</sup> Summit was of particular importance.

*As political spaces for civil society continue to shrink, the GFMD has become a standout example of how self-organized engagement by all stakeholders should look like, and how this enables us to reach our shared goals together.*

Stella Opoku-Owusu

Civil Society delegates participated actively in the GFMD's Regional Consultations and Summit, and brought forward the key priorities and inputs they had consulted about prior to each main activity. This was especially elaborated in our [Civil Society Preparatory Meeting \(CPSM\)](#) held for all civil society delegates just before the Summit, calling upon the GFMD Community to be bold and courageous to ensure all are protected. In particular, it was felt that the COVID-19 pandemic **offers a unique window of opportunity to rebuild boldly and create equitable, inclusive societies that benefit all and do not leave migrants behind**, as delegates concluded at the final plenary of the GFMD CSPM.

At the same time, this Summit forever changed the way civil society interacted and participated in the GFMD, as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) introduced or crystallized a number of forward-looking changes when they took over the GFMD Chairmanship in January 2020. The UAE – a very engaged member of the GFMD Steering Group for years and a vocal advocate of structural changes to the GFMD – proposed the GFMD to be a **year-long process, with six GFMD Regional Consultations** to be held over the course of 2020, in partnership with State-led Regional Processes. These brought together governments and the three GFMD mechanisms (civil society, local authorities and the private sector). Each Regional Consultation focused on three of the six 2020 GFMD themes, providing the substance for the thematic background papers which were discussed in the [Summit Roundtables](#). This allowed civil society to participate actively in all GFMD events and engage in in-depth discussions on the six GFMD themes throughout 2020. By meeting prior to each regional meeting, consulting

### The Future of Human Mobility: Innovative Partnerships for Sustainable Development

1. The Governance of Labour Migration in the Context of Changing Employment Landscapes
2. Skilling Migrants for Employment
3. Leveraging New Technologies to Empower Migrants
4. Addressing Gaps in Migrant Protection
5. Discussing Approaches to Address Irregular Migration – What Works? What Doesn't?
6. Fostering Partnerships to Realise Migration-Related Goals in the Sustainable Development Agenda and Managing the Future of Human Mobility

broadly with civil society organizations at the regional level, and having the possibility for a civil society rapporteur to present the results of these preparatory meetings during the GFMD Consultations themselves, civil society was able to build up a **strong incremental process towards the 13<sup>th</sup> Summit**. A civil society representative was also invited to contribute to the elaboration and finalization of each of the GFMD Thematic Background Papers under the leadership of the thematic leads (experts) and roundtables' co-chairs (governments), thereby ensuring that the key civil society advocacy points were reflected in the final papers. The Regional Consultations thus provided the **space for regional and multi-stakeholder contributions and perspectives to feed into global priorities**.

At the same time, the UAE also introduced a major change for civil society by agreeing to **open the entire Summit to all GFMD stakeholders**. This meant that all civil society delegates were invited to attend *all* the GFMD Summit program instead of only participating in some selected sessions, as it used to be the case in the past. In addition, for the

Summit program, the UAE introduced a series of **'Networking Meetings'** wherein non-states delegates met and dialogued directly with government delegates through each of their respective non-state mechanism.

Finally, an **Advisory Group** for the 2020 GFMD (which included all the GFMD mechanisms, representatives of former chairs, and independent experts in their roles as thematic leads) was established by the UAE Chair, already in July 2019, with the aim to support the development of the GFMD vision for 2020. Two NGOs were invited to join, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), in its official capacity as the GFMD Civil Society Coordinating Office, and Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA), providing an opportunity for regular and direct contacts with the Chair and for civil society proposals to help shape the GFMD Summit and other activities throughout the year. The Advisory Group also provided a space for an immediate reflection on the pandemic, which led to the creation of an **ad-hoc working group on the impact of COVID-19 on migrants**, migration and development in April 2020, as proposed, among others, by civil society.

Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, all regional consultations, and eventually the GFMD Summit itself, had to be held online. While this proved to be challenging in a number of ways and required everyone to adapt very quickly to the new online reality, all the events were maintained and became accessible to all delegates regardless of their location and public health restrictions.

As such, civil society adapted its organizing and activities **to the year-long process introduced by the UAE and the online format induced by the pandemic**. The GFMD Civil Society Coordinating Office worked closely with its International Steering Committee (ISC) - a body composed of 30+ civil society organizations from all over the world, which provides direction and guidance to ICMC, and a smaller ad-hoc Program Committee. To reflect the fact that all civil society delegates could now participate fully in the entire GFMD Summit, it was decided by the ISC and Program Committee to rename the traditional “Civil Society Days” (a designation established by the Chair of the first GFMD when civil society met separately from the GFMD). The civil society meeting preceding the summit was thus named the **GFMD Civil Society Preparatory Meeting (CSPM)** instead and was developed **to build on the regional consultations, and to brief, consult with, and develop joint civil society inputs with all delegates prior to the Summit**.

**183 civil society delegates** (out of some 250 initially identified based on their participation in the regional consultations as well as in prior GFMD Civil Society Days) attended the GFMD CSPM and subsequent Summit. During four days between 7 and 15 January 2021, they met online and held in-depth discussions in both plenary and breakout sessions. To facilitate the process, the [6 GFMD themes](#) were consolidated into three themes, and a fourth one on COVID-19 was added, for a total of **4 thematic areas**:

1. **The Governance of Labor Migration and Skilling Migrants for Employment**
2. **Addressing Gaps in Migrant Protection**
3. **Discussing Approaches to Irregular Migration**
4. **COVID-19 – Building Back Better for Migrants**

These discussions, led by a group of co-facilitators and thematic rapporteurs, supported by breakout group moderators and the coordinating office team, helped identify **four key priority areas** that were brought to the GFMD Summit and which constitute civil society thematic priorities beyond the Summit (see details below).

## OUTCOMES & RECOMMENDATIONS

### Civil Society Thematic Priorities

The following **four thematic priority areas were agreed upon by all civil society delegates** as a result of the Civil Society Preparatory Meeting, and were presented as follows in [the closing session of the GFMD Summit](#) by our civil society representative, Helena Olea, who urged their **inclusion in GFMD programs and discussions going forward** :

#### A. Xenophobia and discrimination against migrants

**The criminalization of migration and racism**, which may have unfortunately influenced some of the most restrictive immigration policies, **must be challenged and addressed**. Particular forms of discrimination suffered by specific groups must be tackled through an intersectional approach. The **narratives on migrants and migration** are essential and we welcome the work that the Ad-hoc Working Group of the GFMD and their “It Takes A Community” campaign have been doing on this matter. The discussion during the side event reflects the importance of bringing it to the forefront.

#### B. Regular pathways, including regularization

Understanding the factors contributing to irregularity is essential in order to address them. Most irregular migration is not the result of unauthorized entrance, but rather stem from the impossibility and inability to extend regular status, and the limited regular pathways available. **Temporary labor migration programs are not the solution**. It is necessary to overhaul the regular migration channels and **ensure decent work as a key priority**, addressing needs in various sectors, and not overlooking some sectors while favoring others in bilateral agreements. It is critical to **recognize different contributions made by migrants**, not only economic contributions, or those made by high-skilled workers. Finally, there needs to be an **acknowledgement that regularization is part of the solution**, and that pathways towards long-term residence are necessary. This topic merits further discussion and the GFMD is uniquely positioned to host those exchanges.

#### C. Due process and access to justice

Due process rights are central in immigration proceedings and in all relationships between migrants and the State. **Accessing justice and legal remedies is essential for migrants**, particularly in labor and family matters, and when they have been victims of crime. **Firewalls and minimum standards that ensure access to information, legal representation, and addressing language barriers, are essential to guarantee access to justice**. We must discuss this important topic in the GFMD to consider different contributions and perspectives, and propose solutions.

#### D. Social protection for all migrants

**Migrants are being left out of social protection networks**, having to fend for themselves. This enhances inequality and conditions of vulnerability. The need to ensure **access to services** without the fear of immigration enforcement has become a pressing issue. The **public health challenges of the pandemic reinforce the need to understand that our collective wellbeing depends on the inclusion of all**. We must find ways to include and rebuild together. We cannot continue leaving people behind.

## Recommendations for the GFMD

Throughout the Summit, including in the [Future of the Forum Session](#), civil society also made the following recommendations regarding the future of the GFMD

1. **The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated that the GFMD is more meaningful and purposeful than ever.** The formula adopted in 2006, when the GFMD was created, remains valid today, precisely because the pandemic has created a global crisis, including a migration and development crisis. During a crisis, international cooperation is of paramount importance, in particular when it is supported by an informal and transparent dialogue, during which the focus is on best practices. We therefore **call upon the GFMD Community** – in particular through its ad hoc Working group on COVID-19 – **to continue to provide a joint response to COVID-19 and its impact on migrants, and with a particular focus now towards recovery efforts post-pandemic** (i.e. building back/forward better). In addition, the Working Group’s role is essential now to ensure that all people worldwide, regardless of status, have access to an effective COVID-19 vaccine in a timely and comprehensive manner.
2. **A truly multi-stakeholder approach**, which has increasingly become the footprint of the GFMD, is also essential when the international community is collectively confronted with massive and brutal losses of lives, jobs and livelihoods. In such a context, solutions can only be built collectively. **Multi-stakeholder partnerships should be developed by all GFMD actors around shared responsibility, honesty and transparency for the well-being of migrants and societies.**
3. **The three innovations brought by the UAE**, following years of an increased collaboration between governments and the other stakeholders, i.e. the GFMD becoming a year-long process with robust regional consultations; the creation of an Advisory Group open to the three mechanisms and independent experts providing inputs throughout the year; and the Summit being entirely open to all delegates, must become **permanent features of the GFMD.**
4. In addition, the **year-long GFMD process should include strong, organized and impactful youth engagement through each stakeholder group**, as proposed by the UN Major Group on Children and Youth (UNMGCY), and begun to be realized this past year in both the Regional Consultations and Summit.
5. **The lack of a GFMD Chair for 2021 and the first part of 2022 is of particular concern to civil society**, as this may lead to a transition year without clear focus or real ownership. A GFMD without a chair is also likely to be a year without a summit, regional consultations or thematic workshops. **Civil society stands ready to continue to invest and contribute to the process this year, to offer our full support to any potential Chair during this vital period, and to work with our vast civil society base to ensure its success.** A potential chair could ensure the implementation of a **thematic roadmap** for 2021-summer 2022, even in the absence of a full GFMD Summit, including through regional or thematic webinars, and possibly a “mini-Summit” (a smaller scale event in-person or virtual) in November or December 2021.
6. With the Troika and the Steering Group in charge of ensuring a meaningful transition, the three mechanisms also **now risk losing their capacity to provide substantive input to the GFMD agenda and shape its future**, since the Steering Group membership is limited to governments only. While civil society does not request full membership, it would appreciate having an **observer status** and being regularly consulted. This should also be extended to the Business and Mayors Mechanisms.