Statement by
International Organization for Migration (IOM)
for
81st Session of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
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Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Dear Colleagues,

It is an honour for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to address the 81st Session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

Asia-Pacific is home to over 40 per cent of the world's migrants. Migration has long been a transformative force in our region, contributing to socio-economic development not only for migrants themselves, but also for communities and countries of origin, transit and destination. IOM welcomes the recognition by ESCAP Member States of the importance of fully integrating migration into the collective pursuit of sustainable development.

Migration is inextricably connected to the theme of this Session: regional cooperation for resilient and sustainable urban development. Migration and urbanization are two of the most powerful "mega trends" of our world today. Nearly half of all internally displaced persons (IDPs) move to urban areas, and millions more migrate to cities in search of work. Climate change further accelerates this trend of urbanization, as rural livelihoods become increasingly precarious. Currently, nearly one out of five migrants globally live in the world's top 20 largest cities, including many migrants from this region. Given the demographic dynamics in our region, including population ageing in some Member States and youth bulge in others, this large-scale migration to urban centers is set to continue and expand.

When managed effectively, migration contributes significantly to the vitality of urban centres—bringing diversity, skills, innovation, and resilience. Migrants are central to addressing demographic challenges, labour market flexibility, and technological advancement, offering solutions our cities need.

However, rapid and unplanned urbanization, coupled with poorly managed migration, can strain public services in urban areas such as housing and healthcare, exacerbate inequalities, and increase social tensions.

Local authorities are at the forefront of these challenges. Yet, their capacities are

increasingly overstretched due to compounding pressures, including climate impacts, public health emergencies, economic volatility, and both new and protracted humanitarian crises.

To unlock the full potential of migration for sustainable urban development, it is critical to ensure that urban planning and local economic systems are inclusive—responding also to the needs and capacities of migrants. Their access to services, decent work, and opportunities to participate in decision-making must be guaranteed. Local governments, civil society, and private sector actors should be connected to global good practices of innovative and inclusive migration management policies, tools, and mechanisms.

In this regard, there is a need to connect local governments, civil society and local companies with innovative efforts for broader migration management policies, tools and practices that are available globally.

As the 2030 deadline for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals approaches, IOM calls attention to three key priorities:

1. **Expand safe, orderly and regular migration pathways**—particularly for women, youth, and low-skilled workers—to protect rights, reduce vulnerabilities, and strengthen community resilience.
2. **Ensure access to services and social protection for all migrants**, regardless of status—especially for healthcare, education, housing, and social welfare.
3. **Enhance data and evidence to inform planning, track progress, and improve understanding of the drivers and impacts of migration**, which will help reduce irregular migration, increase community resilience, and enhance regional cooperation.

The Asia and the Pacific region has the capacities to lead in shaping migration governance systems that are human-centered, right-based, development-focused, and climate-resilient. By so doing, we not only accelerate the pace to achieve the SDGs, but also lay the foundation for a more inclusive, prosperous, and sustainable future for everyone in our region.

IOM remains committed to working alongside Member States, governments, regional bodies, local authorities, civil society, and the private sector to translate priorities into meaningful action.

Thank you.