Introduction for the panel discussion "Participation, inclusion and the right to development of migrants"

EMRTD 13th session
Thursday 23 April 3:00 pm – 4:30 pm

This session invites us to reflect on the application of the right to development to migrants in countries of destination, and on how the normative content of the Declaration on the Right to Development can provide concrete guidance for migration governance, policymaking, and accountability.

The Declaration affirms that development is a comprehensive, human-centred process in which every person is entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy development. It also establishes that States have a duty to formulate development policies aimed at the well-being of the entire population, without distinction of any kind. From the perspective of the Expert Mechanism, this principle is clear: migrants, regardless of status, fall fully within the scope of the right to development.

Yet, in practice, migrants are frequently excluded from development frameworks. They are often viewed primarily through the lenses of labour supply, border control, or security, rather than as rights-holders and agents of development. Restrictive policies, unequal access to services, exploitative labour arrangements, and discriminatory narratives undermine migrants' participation and agency, and in doing so, undermine development itself.

In this context, the Expert Mechanism poses the question of how the right to development can be operationalized. In that spirit, today's discussion focuses on participation and inclusion as core components of the right to development, and on how their denial creates structural obstacles to equitable and sustainable development.

Several interrelated questions guide this exchange including on:

i) the meaningful participation of migrants in economic, social, cultural, and political life in destination countries;

ii) non-discrimination and equality of opportunity and how can a right-to-development framework help identify and remove relevant obstacles?
iii) protection from exploitation and the role that international human rights, labour standards and accountability mechanisms play in protecting migrants' dignity and development?
iv) international cooperation and shared responsibility and how can cooperation among countries of origin, transit, and destination better reflect shared obligations for development outcomes?

We hope for this discussion to generate practical insights and recommendations that can inform States, UN actors, and other stakeholders on how to align migration governance with the right to development.

Ultimately, this discussion goes to the heart of our mandate. Recognizing migrants as participants in development is not merely a policy choice; it is a legal and normative requirement rooted in human dignity, equality, and international cooperation.

I look forward to our panellists' reflections and to a constructive exchange that advances the implementation of the right to development for all.

Thank you.