

FINAL CONCLUSIONS OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON
“THE ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF DIASPORAS”

Amman, 18 September 2019

1. Background of the regional conference

The Parliamentary Network on Diaspora Policies, in cooperation with the Jordanian House of Representatives, held a Regional Conference on “*The economic potential of diasporas*” in Amman, Jordan, on 18 September 2019. The conference brought together 75 participants from 25 countries, including Diaspora non-governmental organisations, members of parliaments, high level government officials, experts, academics and diplomatic representatives.

Following up on the March 2018 meeting in Jordan of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, which focused on the situation of migrants and refugees in Jordan, in the Middle East and North Africa region, this conference looked into practical ways of enhancing diasporas’ contribution to development in countries of origin and host countries.

Diasporas have formed effective social, cultural and economic networks all over the world. Host and home countries should draw benefits from these networks by involving diasporas in policy-making and by creating an attractive climate for diasporas to contribute to national development.

Countries with higher levels of diaspora involvement have proved their better prospects for economic growth, and some governments have introduced programmes to encourage diasporas and their families to invest. Some officially recognise their diasporas as an integral part of national development plans. But despite the obvious advantages of attracting investors and entrepreneurs from diasporas to work with their countries of origin, many countries still impose restrictions on them, including access to information, legal obstacles to economic engagement, access to employment and property rights. The conference focused on how diasporas can be engaged to introduce new and better practices in their counties of origin, attract foreign investment, facilitate technology and knowledge transfer, and explored the role of national parliaments in fostering this process.

2. General conclusions

The character of immigration has significantly changed over the past decades, consequently at present stage states are confronted with the movement not only of people and goods but also of knowledge, investment and business opportunities. States should put in place effective programmes to develop cooperation between different stakeholders to achieve real economic results from a wide range of diaspora activities. Such programmes should be designed in consultation with the private sector, trade unions and other social partners to maximise their economic impact and public support.

The economic relevance of diasporas is built on the flow of knowledge for which the states should make a collective effort of expanding and strengthening. Through the examination of the needs of new economies, the states would increase opportunities for “brain circulation”.

The economic potential of diaspora members is often overlooked, and there is a particular lack of systematic collection of information on the success of implemented measures and for the

evaluation of diasporas' economic activities. In cooperation with the relevant international organisations and non-governmental organisations, states are invited to develop effective integration mechanisms that will enhance closer interaction between the national authorities and diaspora organisations.

Members of diasporas should be encouraged to organise themselves in regional/inter-regional networks and establish appropriate mechanisms that will enable their enhanced participation in the economic development of both their countries of origin and their host countries. States can benefit from close cooperation with diaspora associations and should therefore ensure the necessary conditions for such partnerships.

The experience of several countries represented during the conference has shown that diasporas could be powerful partners for states to foster economic development and cooperation in the region.

The general conclusions and recommendations are intended to serve as a basis for the further work of the Diaspora Network in this area.

3. Thematic conclusions and recommendations

After hearing presentations by panellists followed by intensive debates, the members of the Parliamentary Network on Diaspora Policies reached the following conclusions and made the recommendations below.

A) With respect to diasporas' contribution to economic development

1. The members of the Network underline the importance of mechanisms to facilitate diasporas' contribution to economic development. Focus should be given to supporting knowledge transfer, innovation, investment, entrepreneurship and philanthropy by:

- recognising the important contribution of diaspora investment and savings in development of the countries of origin and their local communities;
- adopting transparent and appropriate regulatory frameworks at national level with respect to diasporas' involvement in economic development, while offering opportunities for employment, skills development and financial contributions by diaspora members to host and home economies;
- elaborating and applying a comprehensive methodology for collecting diaspora-related data on the effects of their contribution to economic development at the local, national, regional and international levels in countries of origin and of settlement;
- elaborating special investment and philanthropic programmes for attracting diaspora involvement in economic development at local, regional and national levels;
- creating special institutions responsible for diaspora-related projects, with active diaspora involvement, for supporting diaspora members and enabling diasporas to share their knowledge and skills with communities in their countries of origin;
- improving the capacities of diplomatic representations connecting diaspora members with their countries of origin, providing the necessary information on investment and job opportunities and conditions, trade possibilities and educational programmes for diaspora;
- encouraging and supporting leadership programmes among diaspora members to maximise their economic, social and cultural impact;

- enhancing partnership between diasporas, governments and the private sector through regular and public meetings;
- promoting projects involving diaspora associations and promoting diaspora involvement in development through international and regional cooperation organisations, such as IOM, the World Bank, the European Union and the Council of Europe and national development agencies;
- simplifying mechanisms for diasporas' contribution to their countries of origin and host countries by creating or strengthening diaspora policy advisory boards on the use of the potential of diasporas in policymaking related to development.

2. The members of the Network further invite states to create the conditions for a greater contribution of diasporas to economic development in home and host countries, by:

- facilitating access to legal residency status, simplification of visa requirements or possibly dual citizenship for diaspora members and their families;
- developing specific tax programmes, portability of pension rights and other economic advantages for diaspora members returning to their countries of origin;
- using financial instruments focusing on investments (diaspora bonds, special credit systems, specific financial benefits for philanthropic activities) to facilitate the mobilisation of diaspora members' capital;
- developing standards and guidelines for the recognition of foreign qualifications (diplomas, certificates, etc.) and acquired skills in different sectors;
- introducing labour mobility initiatives, including permanent, seasonal, temporary and circular job programmes to fill vacancies in labour markets;
- investing in human capital development by promoting entrepreneurship, career training and skills development programmes among diaspora members, productive employment creation in line with labour market needs and including cooperation with the private sector and trade unions;
- encouraging the setting-up by national authorities of regional/inter-state diaspora business forums and ensuring regular consultation with diaspora professionals to identify strategic economic areas and attract diaspora resources to them.

B) With respect to new approaches to the mobilisation of diaspora resources for development

1. The members of the Network encourage states to strengthen the potential of diaspora involvement in economic progress through the use of modern technologies, by:

- promoting special social media platforms linking diaspora populations, both in the countries of origin and host countries, for their further connection with investors;
- organising and promoting open online platforms for all diaspora-related projects and initiatives, and providing easily accessible information and guidance for the coordinated and effective financial, voluntary or philanthropic engagement of diasporas;
- promoting and expanding existing scientific and alumni networks for knowledge sharing and innovation; exploring the opportunities provided by these networks for encouraging international cooperation in diverse social and economic programmes;
- encouraging national education institutions to open their academic communities to involve academics from diasporas in knowledge sharing and skilled partnerships, including use of the opportunities provided by new information technologies (video lecturing, online joint research or/and courses, etc.);

- using technology and digitalisation to assess and recognise qualifications, acquired competencies and professional experience in order to provide equivalence or comparability in national systems.
2. The Network encourages the enhancement of potential of diaspora involvement in economic progress of home countries through the facilitation of remittance flows by:
- developing national remittances strategies and assessment mechanisms for measuring the benefits of remittances for national economies;
 - reducing administrative and bureaucratic obstacles to financial transactions by minimising the cost of transfers, avoiding double taxation, optimising and digitalising banking services etc.;
 - supporting the development of innovative technological solutions for remittance transfers, such as mobile payments, digital tools, e-banking, nonbank financial solutions etc., which facilitate cost reduction and provide immediate access and transparency;
 - establishing and supporting online information portals making available data on the evaluation of remittance transfer costs, speed and other significant parameters in order to increase transparency and competition on the remittance transfer market;
 - encouraging international institutions to continue research and cooperation to leverage the development impact of remittances.

Other decisions and final remarks

Once discussed and adopted, the recommendations set out in the final conclusions will be communicated to national authorities, international organisations and diaspora associations.

Participants expressed their sincere gratitude to the Jordanian House of Representatives for hosting the conference and for their organisational support, and to the Swiss Confederation for its generous contribution, which has made the work of the Network possible.