



International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families

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Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families Thirty-third session

Summary record of the 464th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 4 October 2021, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Ünver

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 73 of the Convention *(continued)*

Third periodic report of Azerbaijan (CMW/C/AZE/3; CMW/C/AZE/QPR/3)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Azerbaijan joined the meeting via video link.*
2. **The Chair** said that the State party's willingness to participate in a hybrid review despite the challenges that it was facing as a result of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic illustrated its support for the treaty body system as a whole and for the Committee in particular. He wished to thank the State party for the warm hospitality that it had extended to the Committee during the mission carried out by Committee members to Baku from 12 to 14 September 2019.
3. **Mr. Huseynov** (Azerbaijan), introducing his country's third periodic report (CMW/C/AZE/3), said that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the country's migration management had adhered to the principles of flexibility, transparency, efficiency and the protection of human rights and freedoms and had been in keeping with the recommendations of relevant international organizations. In order to protect the rights of foreigners and stateless persons and ensure their access to migration services, the Government had automatically extended the temporary stay period of nearly 70,000 such persons by 1 September 2021. It had suspended the expulsion of migrants and their placement in detention centres, irrespective of their legal status; streamlined migration services and procedures, including by enabling the family members of foreigners with work permits to apply for temporary residence permits online; and taken measures to prevent foreigners from becoming illegal migrants. The Government had also begun processing applications for refugee status electronically as part of an innovative approach that had been identified as a best practice by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and elsewhere too it had expanded the use of e-services, including for the submission of applications. It had provided food, temporary accommodation and medical care to vulnerable migrants with the support of local and international donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and had included all foreign residents in the country's COVID-19 vaccination campaigns.
4. On 27 September 2020, in response to severe provocation by the Armenian armed forces, Azerbaijan had launched a counteroffensive that had ended close to 30 years of occupation and injustice. It had done so strictly in observance of the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. The restoration, reconstruction and reintegration of the newly liberated territories and the sustainable resettlement of internally displaced persons were hindered by the fact that, during the occupation, Armenia had planted landmines, destroyed thousands of historical and cultural monuments and residential areas, savagely exploited natural resources and polluted drinking water reservoirs.
5. During the reporting period, Azerbaijan had adopted or begun to formulate strategic documents that provided for measures to improve labour migration processes, expedite procedures for foreigners and stateless persons at border crossing points, facilitate the issuance of visas and prevent the illegal influx of foreign labour. The objectives of the draft National Migration Strategy included simplifying legal migration procedures, developing a system to protect vulnerable groups and raising awareness of migration issues. Pursuant to the Migration Code, which had entered into force on 1 August 2013, the national migration legislation was based on the principles of respect for human and civil rights and freedoms, the rule of law, equality before the law, impartiality and transparency. According to article 75 of the Code, in all cases other than those covered by the Labour Code, migrant workers enjoyed the same rights as citizens of Azerbaijan in respect of working conditions.
6. The Unified Migration Information System, a database of information on stateless persons, refugees and other foreigners in the country and on Azerbaijani citizens living abroad, had been fully integrated with other relevant systems, such as the State Register of Population. From 2016 to 1 July 2021, work permits had been granted to 43,201 foreigners and stateless persons and residence permits had been issued to some 82,000 migrant workers of various categories who were dispensed from the requirement to obtain a work permit. As

at 1 July 2021, a total of 11,550 labour contracts concluded with foreigners and stateless persons had been logged in the centralized electronic information system of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, thus making it easier to protect the labour rights of those persons.

7. The national insurance and pension system provided reliable social protection to migrant workers, for whom social insurance contributions were mandatory. The State Social Protection Fund was currently paying pensions to 80 foreign residents from more than 10 countries and to 71 foreigners living abroad. There were no restrictions on migrant workers joining trade unions. Between 2016 and 1 April 2021, six NGOs had been established by foreigners.

8. In the 2020/21 academic year, 10,606 foreign and stateless students had attended secondary schools in Azerbaijan. In line with a commitment made by the Government at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum, the higher education expenses of two refugees had been covered by their institutions. The plan was to continue funding the education of refugees in the future. The Ministry of Education and the State Migration Service did not exchange information on the legal status of the parents of foreign students, thereby ensuring full access to education for all persons, regardless of their migration status.

9. Migrants had unrestricted access to emergency and other medical care, without discrimination. From 2013 to 1 July 2021, 19,564 foreigners and stateless persons had been registered in the citizens' electronic health card system of the Ministry of Health, while 7,379 had received inpatient treatment. Over the same period, 17,603 children had been born to foreign or stateless parents. All children born in Azerbaijan were registered, regardless of their parents' migration status.

10. As a result of amendments to the law on freedom of religious belief, the article prohibiting religious propaganda by foreigners did not apply to worship, rites or ceremonies performed by foreign and stateless religious professionals who had been invited by religious institutions operating in Azerbaijan or by those who were paying an official visit to the country. From 2013 to 1 July 2021, 152 foreigners and stateless persons had been issued with residence permits for religious purposes.

11. In municipal elections held in 2019, around 3,700 foreign nationals had met the necessary criteria and had cast ballots. Stateless persons who satisfied the requirements laid down in the Election Code and had been permanently residing in Azerbaijan for at least five years could participate in referendums and presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections.

12. Foreigners and stateless persons had the right to lodge complaints against State bodies, political parties, legal persons, municipalities and officials. Under the Labour Code, migrant workers could appeal to the judicial authorities on an equal footing with citizens. In compliance with the law on courts and judges, their right to judicial protection was guaranteed at all stages of court proceedings. A mechanism had been put in place to enable applicants who had failed to obtain a permanent residence permit to obtain a temporary permit on the basis of documents that they had already submitted. In 2019, 10 new grounds for obtaining a temporary permit had been added to the Migration Code.

13. The domestic legislation had been amended so that foreigners and stateless persons who violated migration laws twice or more over a period of three years were no longer subject to a five-year entry ban, and persons who received an administrative fine for such violations could leave the country freely and re-enter upon payment of the fine. To facilitate the naturalization of stateless persons living in Azerbaijan, rules for the determination of citizenship had been approved in 2015, and the law on citizenship had been amended in 2018. In September 2020, an inter-agency working group on statelessness issues had been set up with a view to eliminating statelessness in the country. Between 2018 and 2020, Azerbaijan had concluded migration cooperation agreements with Belarus, Belgium, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan with the aim of better regulating and managing migration processes.

14. On 1 November 2020, the Government, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), had launched a project to support the establishment in Azerbaijan of a regional training centre on migration; the centre had already delivered its first

online training session, with the participation of representatives of relevant government agencies in neighbouring countries in Central Asia and Eastern Europe.

15. Azerbaijani citizens who left the country to reside abroad temporarily or permanently were registered at the relevant consulate. In 2020, rules for the provision of social assistance to low-income Azerbaijanis living abroad had been approved. A bill addressing the situation of citizens living in other countries and diaspora organizations had been prepared and was currently under negotiation.

16. The State Migration Service had expanded the number of e-services that it provided and had developed a mobile application to facilitate access to them. Its official website was available in Azerbaijani, English and Russian, as was its hotline, which played a pivotal role in raising awareness of migration issues among citizens, foreigners and stateless persons. Between 2013 and 1 July 2021 a number of events had been organized to raise public awareness of migration legislation by providing detailed information on the relevant laws.

17. Up to 1 July 2021, a total of 1,794 people had been readmitted to Azerbaijan pursuant to agreements concluded with other countries. The Government was working hard to promote legal labour migration, which was essential for the effective protection of the rights of all migrant workers and members of their families.

18. On 22 July 2020, the President had issued an order approving the 2020–2024 National Action Plan on Combating Human Trafficking, which provided for 69 activities to be undertaken by numerous government, non-governmental and academic institutions. From 2017 to 2020, appropriate assistance had been given to six foreigners identified as victims of human trafficking.

19. The Protocol on Cooperation in Combating Terrorism in the Caspian Sea to the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Security in the Caspian Sea of 18 November 2010 and the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse had been approved in 2019.

20. **Mr. Kariyawasam** (Country Rapporteur) said that he wished to commend the Government for the adoption of the National Employment Strategy (2019–2030), enhancement of the social protection of migrant workers, improvement of the labour migration quota system and establishment of the Fund for Support to the Azerbaijani Diaspora. He wondered whether progress had been made towards the adoption of the National Strategy on Migration and whether the draft incorporated all the other strategies aimed at guaranteeing the rights of migrant workers within the country, and also of Azerbaijani nationals working abroad.

21. He wished to know whether migrant workers, their families and other foreigners were provided with the same facilities as Azerbaijani nationals under the State party's COVID-19 vaccination programme, and specifically asked about the situation of those who were over 65 years of age.

22. A large number of the State party's citizens were working in the Russian Federation, which was not a party to the Convention. The Committee had been informed that many of them were subjected to ill-treatment. He asked what action the State party took to address such grievances. He would be interested to hear how many consulates were based in the Russian Federation, whether Azerbaijani nationals were provided with free legal support, particularly if they were incarcerated, and what measures were taken on behalf of victims of xenophobia.

23. In his opening statement, Mr. Huseynov had referred to "illegal migrants" and "illegal migration". The Committee preferred to use the terms "irregular migrants" and "irregular migration".

24. Given the importance of the remittances paid by Azerbaijani migrant workers living in other countries, he wished to know whether there were special arrangements to facilitate the transfer of funds. Commending the measures taken to establish a reliable data system, he asked whether the system could disaggregate data in a manner that provided a clear overview of the number of foreigners, stateless persons and migrant workers who were currently living in the State party. A sound policy framework depended on the availability of precise and

disaggregated data. Lastly, he found the distinction between work permits and residence permits somewhat confusing and would welcome an explanation of the grounds on which it was based.

25. **The Chair**, speaking as Country Rapporteur, said that he wished to know whether a strategy had been adopted for the purpose of supporting Azerbaijani citizens working abroad and whether it reflected the provisions of the Convention.

26. The adoption of the National Strategy on Migration, which should reflect the provisions of the Convention, would constitute an act of regional importance. During the visit by Committee members to the State party, it had been agreed that the status of Azerbaijan as one of the first countries to ratify the Convention conferred on it a moral duty to promote further ratification in the region. Accordingly, the Strategy should set an example of how best to implement migration policies.

27. The treaty body system was undergoing reforms aimed at addressing challenges related to the submission of reports and the conduct of constructive dialogues. Some States parties had established task forces or other bodies to promote more effective coordination of their reports to the different treaty bodies. He would be interested to hear whether such a body already existed in Azerbaijan.

28. **Mr. Corzo Sosa** said that the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights had engaged in a constructive dialogue with a delegation from the State party the previous week. He had been unable to find answers to some of the questions raised, for instance concerning cases of exploitation and forced labour. The delegation had been asked whether workers in the informal sector were protected by labour and social protection laws. As migrants were frequently employed in that sector, he would like to know how complaints of ill-treatment were handled. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights had been informed that transnational companies in the energy sector violated the principle of equal pay for equal work. It had also asked the delegation of Azerbaijan whether workers in the oil and gas sector freely exercised trade union rights and whether they were protected against reprisals. He would appreciate any response that the State party could provide to those questions.

29. The Committee on Migrant Workers had been informed that more than 1,000 migrants were held in detention centres. He would like to hear whether there had been complaints of abuse or limited access to food, for instance in the Detention Centre for Illegal Migrants in Baku. According to information from the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, asylum seekers who were placed in such centres on a voluntary basis were held in mixed facilities with convicts.

30. Persons found crossing the State border without identification documents or entering the country without passing through a border crossing were liable either to a fine or to imprisonment for up to 2 years. He asked whether in the delegation's view such conduct should constitute reasonable grounds for prosecution.

31. Although a Working Group had been established in September 2018 to increase the effectiveness of cooperation with treaty bodies, the State party's report, which had been due in 2018, had not been received until February 2020. He enquired about the reason for the delay.

32. **Mr. Botero Navarro** said that the Committee had received reports that 1,237 persons had been detained in 2019 in the two detention centres for so-called illegal migrants. Most of them had come from Pakistan, Turkey and neighbouring countries, but Azerbaijan was also a destination country for people from many other Asian countries, including those in the Caucasus. He wished to know how the detention of migrants was deemed to comply with international norms, and specifically articles 16 and 17 of the Convention.

33. He would be interested to know how migrants in vulnerable situations, such as asylum seekers, refugees and children, were protected against detention. The Committee's general comments Nos. 3, 4 and 5 established clear standards aimed at prohibiting the detention of children and their families.

34. The Committee had learned that the State party had in 2013 signed a Mobility Partnership with the European Union and eight of its member States, and that in 2014 it had signed an agreement with the European Union on the readmission of persons residing in its member States without authorization. The Committee would appreciate additional information on the agreements' provisions safeguarding the right of individuals to leave their country of residence and to seek asylum and international protection.

35. The Committee welcomed the fact that the authorities had adopted a simplified procedure for stateless persons to acquire permanent residence in Azerbaijan. He noted, however, that persons from Azerbaijan who resided abroad but only possessed the passport of the former Soviet Union had been rendered stateless. The Committee was also concerned about the lack of universal birth registration, as registration was a crucial prerequisite for acquiring proof of nationality. It would therefore appreciate information concerning measures to establish a statelessness determination procedure so that the persons concerned might eventually acquire Azerbaijani nationality.

36. **Mr. Babacar** said that, according to the Migration Code, migrant workers enjoyed the same rights as Azerbaijani citizens, except for cases specified in the Labour Code. He wished to know what those cases were.

37. In the event of early termination of migrants' employment contracts and their failure to secure alternative employment, they were given 10 working days to leave the country. He wondered why they were accorded such a short period to rectify their precarious situation.

38. **The Chair** said that he wished to know whether, following the 2020 war, the State party had established a migrant worker recruitment programme to reconstruct the Nagorno-Karabakh region for the benefit of persons displaced in the 1990s to other parts of Azerbaijan.

39. **Mr. Kariyawasam** said that he wished to know whether the State party conducted inspections to help protect children of migrant workers, particularly those in an irregular situation, against labour exploitation. He would appreciate an explanation of how the prohibition against exiting the country, a provision of the Migration Code, worked both for foreigners and the State party's own nationals. The Committee was concerned that such a ban might violate the freedom to leave any State, as provided for by the Convention.

40. **Mr. Charef** said that he would be interested to hear whether the State party, which had become a transit country for migrants, had any research centres studying migration issues that were capable of informing the Government's decision-making.

The meeting was suspended at 4.30 p.m. and resumed at 4.55 p.m.

41. **Mr. Huseynov** (Azerbaijan) said that work had begun on the draft of the National Migration Strategy in 2019 with the active participation of the office of IOM in Azerbaijan and the State Migration Service. The Strategy would cover best practice in the field, contain extensive action plans and serve to coordinate the activities of all relevant bodies. It would have a positive impact on both migrant workers in Azerbaijan and the country's nationals working abroad. Various government bodies, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State committee for diaspora affairs, provided support to Azerbaijani nationals living abroad, and the State Migration Service offered information to those who intended to leave the country.

42. A COVID-19 vaccination strategy had been adopted by a special body created under the Cabinet of Ministers. Azerbaijan had been one of the first countries to offer vaccinations. Initially, only refugees, asylum seekers and migrants with permanent residence permits were entitled to receive vaccinations on an equal footing with Azerbaijani nationals. Later, the programme had been extended to include holders of temporary residency permits, and then to all foreigners residing legally in the country, without discrimination.

43. **Mr. Mammadov** (Azerbaijan) said that in cities such as Moscow and Saint Petersburg his country had several consular offices that offered services to defend the rights of its citizens in the Russian Federation. The offices provided information and assistance to Azerbaijani nationals who had been detained and issued reports on their conditions of detention, court cases and any rights violations. Agreements were in place concerning

employment and working conditions, which also covered the recognition of diplomas and the rights of migrant workers' family members.

44. **Mr. Huseynov** (Azerbaijan) said that there was currently no special mechanism to facilitate the transfer of remittances, but the Government was working on a project in collaboration with IOM to provide better terms for such transfers.

45. The national migrant management system had a central database containing comprehensive information related to migration questions. The Government used business intelligence software to compile and retrieve disaggregated information, and it was working with its international partners to improve the database to the highest standards.

46. Business permits were a form of residence permits granted to foreign nationals who owned property, invested or opened a business in the country. However, a business permit did not confer a right to work, which required a separate work permit. Anyone who held a work permit automatically had the right to engage in business activities.

47. The State Migration Service was the main body responsible for coordinating issues related to compliance with the Convention, and it was supported by other bodies. Task forces were established to focus on specific matters such as issues related to readmission and asylum. For example, a task force had been set up to facilitate discussions on protocols for assisting Azerbaijani migrants returning from European Union member States. No cases of forced labour had been detected among migrants. Questions related to forced labour and human trafficking were dealt with by a specialized department under the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

48. Salaries were agreed between companies and their employees within prescribed limits established under the Labour Code. Foreign workers tended to be paid more than local workers, often because they had specific skills and specializations. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection was responsible for the enforcement of the Labour Code, and no complaints had been received from migrant workers concerning pay. Migrant workers were able to join and form trade unions without any restriction.

49. Detention centres for illegal migrants were monitored by the Ombudsman and civil society organizations to ensure the best possible standards of living. Persons staying at the detention centres voluntarily, who were mostly asylum seekers and persons applying for refugee status, were housed separately from other detainees. Approximately two thirds of persons at the detention centres resided there voluntarily while awaiting arrangements to be made for them to leave the country. Most of the other detainees were held for periods not exceeding 24 hours by the State Migration Service, while some were arrested by other law enforcement bodies. Living conditions were generally good, as corroborated by reports from the Ombudsman and NGOs that visited the centres.

50. The prohibition against exiting the country was not applied to Azerbaijani nationals. The State Migration Service could only temporarily prohibit foreigners who had violated immigration rules from leaving the country. Crossing the border illegally was an offence under the Criminal Code and was punishable by a fine or imprisonment. Only the courts had the authority to impose such penalties. Persons who had entered the country illegally with the intention to claim asylum were not held criminally responsible for the illegal entry, and their asylum applications were processed through the usual channels.

51. Mobility partnership agreements had been in effect for many years and an agreement with the European Union on the readmission of persons residing without authorization had been signed in 2014. Azerbaijani nationals whose appeals against deportation from European Union member States had been rejected received support under that framework. Persons who had been born in Azerbaijan and had been working elsewhere in the former Soviet Union at the time of its collapse could apply to return to Azerbaijan through the country's diplomatic missions in their countries of residence. Their cases were then referred to the Commission on Citizenship Issues, which assessed their applications and carried out investigations to corroborate the persons' place of birth. In recent years, numerous changes and amendments had been made to the citizenship determination procedure to facilitate that process. In 2019, a high-level conference had been held with the support of UNHCR with a view to decreasing statelessness in the country. Furthermore, the State Migration Service worked in cooperation

with other bodies to conduct awareness-raising campaigns throughout Azerbaijan to identify stateless persons and help them regularize their status.

52. The Migration Code established exemptions to the Labour Code for migrant workers; they were all related to the fact that migrant workers were required to have work permits in order to be employed. Employers who wished to terminate a contract with a migrant worker were required to give one month's notice. Upon expiry of the notice period, migrant workers had 10 days in which to find another employer or to declare to the State Migration Service any other grounds for remaining in the country. Migrants who failed to meet those requirements could leave the country and later reapply for a work visa. The same conditions applied to migrants working in the Azerbaijani territories that had recently been liberated from foreign occupation.

53. For migrants travelling through Azerbaijan, a transit visa was available and specific regulations were in place. There had been a sharp decline in the number of transiting migrants owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. So far, the number of migrants attempting to pass through the country as a result of the situation in Afghanistan had not risen significantly.

54. **Mr. Jafarov** (Azerbaijan) said that under the decree signed by the President in September 2018, which had established a working group to boost cooperation with the United Nations human rights mechanisms, draft periodic reports to the treaty bodies were to be prepared three months prior to their deadlines and to be submitted to the President for approval. At the end of each year, the working group reported to the President on the fulfilment of the treaty bodies' recommendations.

55. **Mr. Soualem** said that he wished to know how many migrant workers resided permanently in Azerbaijan with their families and how many people were in the Azerbaijani diaspora. It would be useful to have the names of the countries with which Azerbaijan had signed readmission or consular assistance agreements.

56. **Mr. Kariyawasam** said that, while the development of the national data system for migrants was commendable, he wondered whether there were measures in place to stop all government agencies from having full access to the data, which might lead to data breaches and corruption. The Committee would also be interested to hear what measures were in place to assist and rehabilitate victims of human trafficking.

57. He wished to know what legislative framework was in place to support Azerbaijani returnees and what mechanisms existed to coordinate measures for them with the authorities in other countries. The Committee would appreciate more detailed information on the implementation of the Reintegration Support to Azerbaijani Returnees (RESTART) programme and would like to know whether the Government cited the fact that Azerbaijan was party to the Convention when dealing with States that were not parties to the Convention in order to secure better conditions for its migrant workers. Given the difficulties faced by migrant workers in the Russian Federation, it would be helpful to have additional statistics on areas such as legal aid provided by Azerbaijani consular offices in that country.

58. **Mr. Charef** said that he would like to know what action was being taken to raise awareness of the Convention throughout the country and to provide training to members of the judiciary.

59. **Mr. Botero Navarro** said that he would be interested to learn what measures the State party was taking to guarantee effective access to justice for migrants who had been victims of crime or who had been involved in labour disputes in Azerbaijan. He also wondered what measures were in place to ensure that migrants were able to access the Azerbaijani justice system even when they were outside of the country.

60. The Committee would like to know whether the State party intended to repeal provisions criminalizing the irregular entry of migrants in view of the standards developed by the Committee and other human rights bodies according to which irregular migration should not be treated as a crime. It would be useful to have information about the steps taken to ensure that vulnerable migrants, including children, asylum seekers and refugees, were not detained, since detention was not in their best interest and might exacerbate their situation.

61. He wondered whether the State party intended to make a declaration recognizing the competence of the Committee to receive and consider complaints from individuals or other States parties under articles 76 and 77 of the Convention and, if so, what progress had been made to that end. The Committee would welcome further information about the legislative or other measures adopted by the State party to fully implement the Convention. For example, did judges directly apply the provisions of the Convention or invoke the Committee's jurisprudence?

62. **The Chair** asked whether victims of human trafficking were required to cooperate with police investigations in order to receive protection and whether they could be held criminally responsible for crossing the border illegally.

63. **Mr. Huseynov** (Azerbaijan) said that the legislation regulating child labour applied to all and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection played an active role in addressing the issue. However, there were no audit procedures or inspections specifically designed to bring to light cases of child labour.

64. The issue of data security was taken seriously and all appropriate security measures were applied. The national migrant management system had been developed specifically for use by the State Migration Service. Certain other government bodies had access to the information for research or statistical analysis, but steps were taken to ensure that personal data were not publicly available and could not be used for illegitimate purposes.

65. University research units had been set up with representatives of civil society organizations involved in migration issues, and the State Migration Service had also started some research initiatives. Furthermore, the Government had launched a two-year project with IOM support to establish centres that provided training on migration issues for various government officials. The curricula and road maps for the implementation of the project were currently under development.

66. Readmission agreements were in place with European Union member States and with Montenegro, Norway and Switzerland. Azerbaijan used those agreements to benefit migrant workers and the Government was generally satisfied with its partners' level of cooperation. Under the RESTART programme, returnees had received assistance to help them start businesses, obtain medical care, follow language courses, receive psychological support and integrate into the local community. Discussions were under way with the relevant stakeholders to extend the programme or launch a similar project. The Working Group on Reintegration, which comprised representatives of the Ministries of Health, Education, Foreign Affairs and Labour and Social Protection, worked in close cooperation with the State Migration Service to facilitate reintegration and guide government policy in the relevant fields.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.