

Report

VMC2021

Re-imagining migration partnerships: Challenges, opportunities and strategies

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Migration Conference 2021

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Afghanistan

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Reflections on the future of
migration partnerships



ICMPD

International Centre for
Migration Policy Development



Vienna Migration Conference—Europe’s leading forum on migration

Once a year, the Vienna Migration Conference provides an indispensable opportunity for thought leaders, decision-makers and frontrunners in the migration sphere to **convene**, **connect** and **engage** in high-level discussions on migration in Europe and beyond.



Vienna Migration Conference 2021

Day 1

Tuesday, 19 October 2021

09.30 – 09.50	Welcome and opening remarks	12.30 – 13.00	In conversation Connecting the Sahara and the Mediterranean
09.50 – 10.00	Re-imagining migration partnerships: An introduction to VMC2021	14.30 – 15.50	Partnerships in action Connecting the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan Routes
10.00 – 11.30	Spotlight session on Afghanistan Challenges, opportunities and strategies <small>In conversation</small> Immediate and long-term priorities to address the unfolding situation in Afghanistan <small>In discussion</small>	15.50 – 16.50	Migration crisis management at the EU's external borders: Geopolitics, preparedness and responses
12.00 – 12.30	<small>In conversation</small> Re-imagining migration partnerships with and for Africa	17.30 – 18.15	Charting forward in a changing global landscape: An armchair debate on Europe's geopolitical challenges
		18.15 – 21.30	Reception upon invitation of the Mayor and Governor of Vienna

Day 2

Wednesday, 20 October 2021

09.00 – 10.20	<small>The Silk Routes in focus</small> International responses to the unfolding situation in Afghanistan	12.10 – 13.10	What works, and what doesn't: Closing reflections on the future of migration partnerships
10.50 – 12.10	<small>The Mediterranean in focus</small> Joint leadership and shared responsibility for a revitalised approach to partnership	13.10 – 13.20	Closing remarks

The Vienna Migration Conference is ICMPD's annual flagship event, and its organisation is the sum of efforts by the organisation's best and brightest across teams and locations.

The organisation of the Vienna Migration Conference 2021 was made possible by the support of

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Welcome

The Vienna Migration Conference 2021 (VMC2021), the sixth edition of ICMPD's annual flagship event, took place in the Palais Niederösterreich on 19 to 20 October, 2021, against a backdrop of unprecedented and seemingly intractable international crises.



The potential humanitarian disaster unfolding in Afghanistan; the instrumentalisation of migrants and refugees by Belarus at its borders with Poland and Lithuania; and the increasingly clear fallout of the global pandemic on society and the economy. All weighed heavily on political agendas over the past year.

The VMC is a forum where officials and other stakeholders discuss such global challenges in an environment designed to maximise opportunities for strategic thinking and finding creative ways forward, both at the plenary's big stage and via a busy schedule of side meetings.

The 2021 conference theme, 'Re-imagining migration partnerships', was deliberately chosen to get momentum behind an issue which governments must confront sooner or later: the need to govern migration in all its manifestations through more enlightened international cooperation acknowledging common challenges and priorities, developing a joint agenda and working in the interests of all.



Political leaders, policymakers and practitioners have developed a variety of tools, instruments, and partnership arrangements over the past few decades –but commitments are not always put into action, nor are the existing cooperation mechanisms always up to the task. Discussions at VMC2021 looked at existing arrangements, shared experiences, changing trends and urgent crises. As regards the latter, H.E. Dr Abdullah Abdullah, former chief executive officer of Afghanistan, joined the opening plenary from Kabul, setting out in stark terms the rapidly worsening food and economic situation in his country, a development reminiscent of the conditions that prompted the mass movements towards Europe in 2015 and 2016.

VMC2021 also discussed the continued relevance of the Joint Valletta Action Plan as a sound basis for advancing migration partnerships, an agreement unique for its comprehensiveness and continent-to-continent focus. Furthermore, the conference reaffirmed the value of the whole-of-route approach to countering irregular migration, providing access to protection and creating channels for legal and labour migration via platforms that are networked and dynamic enough to respond to changing tactics and patterns.

The hybrid format of the conference, reflecting the post-pandemic transition currently underway, provided space for both live and online audiences to interact with speakers. Over the course of two days, the event hosted nine sessions with 34 speakers, with around 150 people participating in person and more than 1,300 joining virtually.

The VMC 2021 report synthesises the central takeaways from these exchanges. Nine session summaries spotlight insights and perspectives from distinguished expert panellists on an array of topics, from enhancing migration partnerships in Africa to crisis management on the Silk Routes and sensitive geopolitical topics. These reflections are further expounded on and analysed in three expert commentaries that put forward strategic recommendations and pragmatic steps that Europe and its partners should pursue to improve migration governance together.

Director General of ICMPD

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19 to 20 October, 2021
Palais Niederösterreich
Herrengasse 13
1st district in Vienna

The 6th edition of the Vienna Migration Conference took place at Palais Niederösterreich, a historic residence in the heart of Vienna, on 19 – 20 October 2021.





- ❶ Bosnia and Herzegovina's Minister Selmo Cikotić, Greek Minister Notis Mitarachi, ICMPD Director Martijn Pluim, Austrian Federal Minister Karl Nehammer, ICMPD Director General Michael Spindelegger, ICMPD Deputy Director General Lukas Gehrke, AUC Commissioner Amira El Fadil
- ❷ ICMPD Director General Michael Spindelegger opens the reception together with Council Member of the City of Vienna Kurt Stürzenbecher
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- ❹ Greek Minister Notis Mitarachi in conversation with ICMPD Director Martijn Pluim





- ❶ Closing panel
- ❷ EASO Senior Advisor Alexander Sorel in conversation with UNHCR Special Envoy Vincent Cochetel, BAMF Vice-President Andrea Schumacher and EASO Executive Director Nina Gregori
- ❸ Director Vladimír Šimoňák, Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs in conversation with Director Jan Orlovský, Slovak Ministry of Interior



- AUC Commissioner Amira El Fadil talking to Ambassador Adam Elhafiz, AUC
- Greek Minister Notis Mitarachi in conversation with ICMPD Director Martijn Pluim and Sabelo Mbokazi, AUC
- Iranian Ambassador Abbas Bagherpour Ardekani talking to Turkish Permanent Representative, Ambassador Muhtar Gün
- ICMPD Deputy Director General Lukas Gehrke in conversation with UNHCR Special Envoy Vincent Cochetel and UNHCR Principal Liaison Adviser Kevin J. Allen





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1 Pier Rossi-Longhi, IOM, greeting Swiss delegates Barbara Schedler-Fischer, Deputy Head of Mission in Vienna and SEM Vice-Director Vincenzo Mascioli
 2 COO Claude-Marcel Gummy and CEO Jürg Rötheli, ORS
 3 MMC Global Programme Coordinator Roberto Forin talking to UNHCR Principal Advisor Kevin J. Allen

4 Cecilia Lundström Carniel, Head of External and Member States Relations, ICMPD
 5 Sébastien Lumet, Director Brussels Office, Groupe d'études géopolitiques, and Editor for Le Grand Continent talking to Director Evelina Gudzinskaitė, Lithuanian Ministry of Interior



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- Iranian Ambassador Abbas Bagherpour Ardekani in conversation with Permanent Representative, Ambassador Ahmet Muhtar Gün and Director General Savaş Ünlü, Directorate General of Migration Management, Turkey
- Minister Selmo Cikotić and his delegation, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- ICMPD Head of Region Julien Simon talking to Director General Neville Aquilina, Maltese Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs



VMC venues



- 2016 Vienna, Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs and Hofburg Palace
- 2017 Vienna, Austrian Academy of Sciences
- 2018 Vienna, Aula of Sciences
- 2019 Vienna, Aula of Sciences
- 2020 Online, broadcasted from BrainTrust studios in Vienna
- 2021 Vienna, Palais Niederösterreich and online, livestreamed on dedicate virtual platform



3

①

INTRO- DUCTION



Opening Remarks

“Now is the right time to re-energise, reinforce and reimagine how we cooperate to manage migration more intelligently and more effectively, especially in a world where increasingly the temptation is to look inward and not outward.”

The 2021 Vienna Migration Conference commenced with ICMPD Director General Michael Spindelegger welcoming Greece as its 19th Member State. This expansion of the ICMPD family underscored the theme of the conference—developing, enhancing, and leveraging migration partnerships to strategically address challenges and seize opportunities related to the movement of people. This impetus comes as labour market shortages, the instrumentalisation of migrants for political purposes, and rising levels of irregular arrivals on key routes all challenge governments. Containment measures and mobility restrictions enacted during the pandemic, moreover, have affected labour migration flows, the size of remittances, and the livelihoods of millions of migrant families around the world. Spindelegger further pointed to regime change in Afghanistan as a pressing concern that could exacerbate the mass displacement of people within and out of the country.



Michael Spindelegger
ICMPD

These latest developments come as long-standing refugee situations continue to go unresolved in Europe’s wider neighbourhood. Furthermore, economic imbalances (worsened by the pandemic), demographic developments, and climate change portend the issue remaining on political agendas for years to come. The speech, however, also sounded an optimistic note. Migration partnerships, Spindelegger stressed, can be a source of job creation and economic development, a catalyst for cross-border trade and investment, and a path towards innovation in securing orderly migration. These partnerships are ever more important in a world where political instincts are steering governments to be more insular and inward. Europe particularly needs to find harmony between the internal and external dimensions of its migration policy as it seeks to position itself geopolitically in the world. This climate underlines the pertinence and promise of the VMC towards fostering effective cooperation and partnership by convening experts, officials, and practitioners from the migration policy community in Europe and across the many regions inter-linked by migration.

→ Watch the full opening remarks!





Karl Nehammer
Austrian Federal Chancellor

The opening remarks delivered by Austrian Federal Minister of the Interior Karl Nehammer (now Austrian Federal Chancellor) contextualised recent migration developments and the approaches that Austria and its partners have adopted in response.

Nehammer particularly underlined the need to remain vigilant in a world where events 5 000 kilometres from home can engender potential consequences for all. Afghanistan's security, economic, and environmental challenges, notably, encompass both global and local dynamics. The current instability, meanwhile, is expected to compound outflows of Afghans to neighbouring countries, including Iran and Pakistan, that already bear a significant refugee burden. Bringing the issue back home, Nehammer cautioned that any further flows of refugees to Europe could stretch capacity to its limits. Partnerships must now turn to ensuring the protection and integration of these refugees by providing adequate education, training, and other opportunities.

The crisis in Afghanistan, significantly, highlights the need for governments and organisations to adopt intersectoral approaches that link and account for the development, humanitarian, security, and migration aspects of crises when rendering assistance. Building mutual trust and understanding, furthermore, must be prioritised if collaborative approaches are to succeed. It is additionally vital that migration policy be both flexible and reactive. The instrumentalisation of migrants for political purposes, for example by Belarus, underscores the imperative for joint solidarity and common approaches to migration management. Nehammer pointed to Austria's deployment of its police tactical unit to Greece in 2020 and Lithuania in 2021 as a step in this direction. He similarly lauded Europe's new Joint Coordination Platform, initiated by Austria, as a promising vehicle for stymieing irregular migration and facilitating asylum and return processes. The platform's support to the Western Balkans to assess asylum claims and administer returns, Nehammer asserted, could help dismantle human smuggling networks that exploit the plight of migrants. Turning to the Central Mediterranean, it is still necessary to step up efforts in the areas of search and rescue, border management, the prevention of migrant smuggling, and support for the reception, accommodation, protection, and integration of migrants in the region (the Libya-Rwanda emergency transit mechanism is a case to be emulated). As no country can solve these problems alone, reinvigorated partnerships provide a promising way forward.

“Important elements of migration partnerships are mutual trust and understanding, an intersectoral approach, and flexibility and reactivity, allowing swift responses to migration challenges.”

“We need to replace the habit of looking for quick fixes in bad times with the habit of engaging in fair and reciprocal long term partnership building also in good times.”

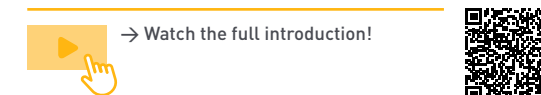


Malin Frankenhaeuser
ICMPD

The theme of VMC 2021, “re-imagining migration partnerships”, was set in motion years ago. As ICMPD's Head of Policy Malin Frankenhaeuser noted in her introductory speech, migration partnerships may have been largely confined to the topic of readmission in the 1990s, but have since then given rise to an array of different types of arrangements, including bilateral and multilateral deals, regional and local cooperation, and agreements between the EU and partner countries (e.g. the EU-Turkey statement). The different models range from cooperation that is narrow in scope to more sophisticated and extensive structures. And the precise form of partnerships continues to evolve as governments seek to pin down the most effective ways to confront challenges spurring and stemming from migration and benefit from the opportunities offered by the movement of people. Pressing regional developments along the Silk Routes and in the Mediterranean have only further heightened the need for revisiting and reassessing existing partnerships and plausible alternative models.

Though partnerships can see emotions run high at times, Frankenhaeuser stressed that their realisation and sustained upkeep in good times can instill good habits that foster greater trust and willingness to cooperate when climates worsen. Any temporary lull in migration flows, consequently, must be viewed as an opportunity to strengthen cooperation frameworks to safeguard against disengagement and prepare for new challenges down the road.

Frankenhaeuser also introduced the regional rationale of the VMC 2021 programme, noting that geographically focused formats enable more targeted discussions on the specific challenges and strategies needed for reimagining partnerships in Europe's neighbourhood and along wider migration routes. A comprehensive, route-specific approach, meanwhile, holds promise in overcoming shortcomings associated with piecemeal strategies that neglect the relevant connections between countries of origin, transit, and destination.



②

THE DISCUSSIONS





Spotlight session on Afghanistan: Challenges, opportunities and strategies

The Taliban summer 2021 offensive across Afghanistan and the rapid fall of Kabul in August left a significant humanitarian crisis in its wake.

On stage H.E. Dr Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation of Afghanistan
H.E. Ahmet Muhtar Gün, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Turkey to the United Nations and International Organizations in Vienna
Sharaf Sheralizoda, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tajikistan
H.E. Abbas Bagherpour Ardekani, Ambassador, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Vienna
Moderation Michael Spindelegger, Director General, ICMPD

Nearly 23 million Afghans—or 55 per cent of the population—are enduring extreme hunger, including around three million malnourished children. Many Afghans, including minority ethnic groups and religious communities persecuted by the militant group, are apprehensive about their safety. The United Nations, amid this precipitously deteriorating environment, warned that up to half a million Afghans may seek to flee the country by the end of 2021. Following the Taliban takeover, neighbouring Iran and Pakistan did, in fact, see sizeable numbers of crossings. These developments have compounded the already dire situation Afghanistan faces—2.2 million Afghan refugees were hosted in neighbouring countries and 3.5 million people were internally displaced even before the recent turmoil. Unemployment, poverty, drought, a drug epidemic, and decades of conflict have ravaged the country. Against this backdrop, the Afghanistan spotlight session opened VMC 2021 and fostered discussion on how to build part-

“There will be no sustainable development in Central Asia without peace and stability in Afghanistan. Central Asia, therefore, needs to react collectively.”
Sharaf Sheralizoda

nerships to respond to the humanitarian crisis situation in Afghanistan and the wider region and prepare for future scenarios. The dialogue included a pre-recorded video interview with former Chief Executive of Afghanistan H.E. Dr Abdullah Abdullah, who spoke from Kabul about unfolding events. Taking stock of Abdullah’s remarks and bringing regional perspectives into the conversation, an ensuing live panel discussion included Tajik Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sharaf Sheralizoda, Iranian Ambassador Abbas Bagherpour Ardekani, and Turkish Ambassador Ahmet Muhtar Gün. The panel was moderated by ICMPD Director General Michael Spindelegger.

It is notable that some headway has already been made in securing aid commitments—countries have indeed rallied behind the consensus that humanitarian aid trumps all, regardless of views towards the Taliban. The international community, to this point, has pledged over €1 billion to avert a major humanitarian catastrophe and socio-eco-

conomic collapse in Afghanistan. Neighbouring countries, including Tajikistan, Iran, and Pakistan, have contributed through a range of measures from the distribution of medical supplies and food assistance to the provision of logistics support and the hosting of sizeable refugee populations.

But according to panellists, a pragmatic approach, based on shared goals, will now be necessary from both the Taliban and international donors if the intended impact of the aid is to be achieved. Buy-in from the Taliban government, Abdullah said, will be key to ensuring that NGOs and international organisations feel safe and can effectively deliver assistance. Abdullah emphasised that the Taliban would also be prudent to come to negotiations with “realistic” expectations regarding priorities like recognition.

“Iran has hosted more than three million Afghans over the past four decades despite the economic cost. This critical juncture makes it difficult for Iran to be in a position to accept more.”

Abbas Bagherpour Ardekani

Sheralizoda, for his part, stressed that stability will be dependent on the new government charting an inclusive cabinet and society that welcomes the voices of all ethnic and religious groups. The international community, meanwhile, will need to take “the middle road” in pursuing engagement with the Taliban, adopting an open-minded approach to partnerships even as countries may hold onto reservations concerning the legitimacy and recognition of the government.

Emblematic of the potential of this type of cooperation, Abdullah pointed to Afghanistan’s former Displacement and Return Executive Committee, which brought together numerous stakeholders including international partners, donors, international financial institutions, NGOs, and governments to address migration holistically. If cooperation between the international community and the Taliban fails to take root, Abdullah warned that donor fatigue could be exacerbated, the loss of skilled personnel in Afghanistan hastened, and the capacity to develop partnerships on migration and other issues in the country impeded. Dialogue on humanitarian matters, by contrast, could serve as a vehicle for opening communication channels with the Taliban that could beget broader progress in other areas.

The UN’s call for the international community to aid countries hosting the greatest number of refugees particularly resonated with panellists. While the UN refugee agency has commended Iran for sheltering millions of Afghan refugees over the past several decades, Ambassador Ardekani underlined the exorbitant costs absorbed by Tehran in rendering educational, medical, and humanitarian assistance. Claiming that the international community only subsidises seven per cent of the total costs of the aid it provides to refugees despite Iran’s own economic challenges, he implored partners to significantly increase their contributions. This sentiment was echoed by Sheralizoda and to Ambassador Gün, who both argued



@jessicabither
Oct 19, 2021

Great to have the opportunity to discuss all things EU migration again in person at #ViennaMigConf. This year all about migration partnerships, starting with a conversation on Afghanistan



“I cannot exaggerate the scale of the humanitarian crisis that Afghanistan is currently facing... I am hesitant to encourage anyone to leave the country but it is also very difficult to convince people not to given the circumstances.”
Dr Abdullah Abdullah

that the accommodative capacities of their countries have been stretched to the limit. Sheralizoda pointed out that Tajikistan had already welcomed 15 000 refugees, and added that the onus now rests on international partners to support the development of infrastructure in Tajikistan to ensure it can safely cope with additional refugee flows and absorb the accompanying financial cost. Stressing that Turkey already hosts 3.7 million Syrian refugees, Ambassador Gün similarly appealed to other countries to accept a greater number of asylum seekers. This stance suggests that the willingness of some countries to provide a safe haven to Afghans may be contingent on easing pre-existing refugee burdens and underscores the importance that budgetary resources be aimed at comprehensively addressing the multi-faceted dynamics of the issue.

The panel placed a final emphasis on the matter of resilience-building in Afghanistan to combat both the root causes of irregular migration at their source and related problems including drugs and weapons trafficking and terrorism. Governments, in this vein, have demanded additional resources

“The issue of recognition should not prevent the creation of pragmatic channels of dialogue with the Taliban.”
Ahmet Muhtar Gün

to counter these perceived threats at their borders, a stance that was reiterated by the panellists. Any resolution mitigating the undergirding factors driving migration and steering Afghanistan towards sustainable development, however, will depend on the Taliban taking considerable steps in building an inclusive government that respects fundamental freedoms and human rights. While humanitarian aid and dialogues could serve as a springboard for cooperation in other areas, this opportunity could also be all too easily squandered. The latter scenario would leave Afghanistan in a vicious cycle, isolated from the world and dependent on humanitarian aid merely to avert major loss of life. Either path will necessitate meticulous diplomacy and compromise to prevent human suffering, ameliorate inequalities, and ensure the sustainable use of resources.

→ Watch the full panel discussion!



In conversation

Re-imagining migration partnerships with and for Africa

On stage H.E. Amira El Fadil, Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, African Union Commission
Michael Spindelegger, Director General, ICMPD



Africa's healthcare system has proven generally resilient to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the region recording among the least fatalities in the world. UN officials, however, have stressed that the continent is now facing a disproportionate socio-economic impact. Unemployment rates remain elevated across Africa, with the critical tourism sector particularly afflicted.

As many as 40 million Africans have been pushed into poverty, according to the World Bank, and International Monetary Fund officials have further warned that a two-track recovery could set Africa back for years to come, even as the rest of the world rebounds. Amid this climate, ICMPD Director General Michael Spindelegger's conversation with H.E. Amira El Fadil, African Union Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs, and Social Development, examined the pandemic's implications for migration and mobility within Africa, assessed recent partnerships in the area of migration management, and explored Africa's priorities and goals with respect to international migration partnerships.

Taking stock of the broad range of the pandemic's effects, from gendered violence to child poverty, El Fadil emphasised that a sustainable way forward will require collaborative responses and a joint vision. But she struck an optimistic chord, asserting that "in every crisis there is an opportunity". The Commissioner pointed to the AU's draft comprehensive paper on the post-pandemic transition, which has received input from all AU Member States and international partners, as an important starting point. Intensified partnership

could, for example, address the pandemic-induced reduction in remittances flowing to the continent. The loss of revenue associated with remittances, El Fadil noted, has inflicted severe ramifications on families who depend on this resource to cover essential expenses including health and education. But the Africa Institute for Remittances, if adequately funded through the support of the EU and other partners, could prove integral to mitigating the impact on beneficiaries. This cooperation could heed lessons from the continent's effective response to mitigate the health impact of the pandemic. This success, El Fadil affirmed, rests on collaborative initiatives, including the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), launched in 2017 and the African Union Vaccine Acquisition Taskforce (AUVAC). These platforms have witnessed African health ministries "speak with one voice" through a shared response to the pandemic and the development of joint COVID-19 vaccination programmes.

It is notable that, even before the pandemic, partnerships were already paying dividends in tackling numerous challenges associated with migration. As a particular achievement, Commissioner El Fadil cited the record of the Tripartite Taskforce, compris-



@R_Schweiger
Oct 19, 2021

@AmiraDSA of the @AfricanUnion with strong words at #ViennaMigConf about partnerships between #Africa and #Europe — we need to look at migration comprehensively & are encouraging free movement in Africa. Need for more intersectional approaches and coherence of processes.



“Going for bilateral solutions is not helping. Because migration is affecting the whole continent of Africa and the whole continent of Europe. I’m proud of the continent to continent dialogue, and we need to make sure that this mechanism is strengthened.”

Amira El Fadil

ing the AU, EU, and UN, in repatriating more than 50 000 African migrants to their countries of origin from Libyan detention facilities beset by a litany of problems including sexual violence, beatings, forced labour, starvation, and overcrowding. The initiative’s dual emphasis on readmission and reintegration has been essential to its success by ensuring that repatriated migrants can restart their lives back home. Meanwhile, a further agreement with Rwanda and UNHCR, since extended to 2023, has provided safe haven to asylum seekers at the Gashora Camp, with more than 50 per cent of these refugees already resettled in countries throughout the world. However, without a holistic focus targeted to the root causes of migration, including joblessness and lack of opportunity, migrants may be pushed to attempt arduous journeys again and again. Prioritisation of a comprehensive approach has been bolstered by the AU’s participation in the Global Compact on Migration. The Commissioner lauded the initiative to open three centres, in Morocco, Mali, and Sudan, to collect and analyse data on the push and pull factors steering migration across the continent. A multi-sectoral approach, though, also rests on recognising that regular migration is a net positive that can contribute to the integration and economic development of the region, in accordance with the AU’s 2063 Agenda.

This resolve will now need to be strengthened if the AU is going to improve welfare across the continent and provide opportunities to all Africans in the wake of the pandemic. But no single actor can do it alone—challenges posed by migration rather obstinately refuse to abide, for example, by the contours of bilateral country accords. El Fadil, to this end, put out a fervent call for officials to “take the AU-EU Continent-to-Continent Migration and Mobility Dialogue to the next level”. This “step up” would acknowledge the achievements of the Continent-to-Continent dialogue and deepen cooperation to encompass discussions at all levels of government, from inter-ministerial summits to peer-to-peer technical exchange. Though COVID-19 has impeded progress on migration partnerships, by intensifying and expanding these partnerships, both the EU and AU can indeed succeed in turning the crisis into an opportunity.

→ Watch the full panel discussion!

In conversation

Connecting the Sahara and the Mediterranean

On stage Vincent Cochetel, Special Envoy of the UNHCR for the Central Mediterranean situation, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Martijn Pluim, Director, Migration Dialogues and Cooperation, ICMPD



Significant mixed-migration flows have put the Central Mediterranean at the top of political agendas for years. The rapidly deteriorating situation facing asylum seekers held in Libyan detention centres and continued deaths during sea crossings to Europe underscore the urgency of the matter. Vincent Cochetel, UNHCR Special Envoy for the Central Mediterranean Situation, provided his insights in a conversation with Martijn Pluim, ICMPD Director of Migration Dialogues and Cooperation.

Their discussion shed light on the need to revitalise and bolster holistic cooperation on migration among and between countries in the region, with an emphasis on addressing the root causes of migration and delivering migration governance support to host countries, recognising that most migration is South-South rather than South-North.

Combatting the root causes of migration must be a pinnacle focus of international efforts. But doing so will require a multi-pronged approach focussed on the collection of reliable data on the individual motivations driving migration and the implementation of different strategies deploying this information. Special Envoy Cochetel expressed optimism that the AU can be instrumental in identifying push and pull factors, particularly with respect to its migration centres in Mali, Morocco, and Sudan. By better understanding the dynamics, including mixed motivations, that steer people to migrate, governments and the international community can take the necessary actions to respond to these influences, be they insecurity, environmental change, or lack of opportunity. Cochetel, relatedly, stressed that the AU will need to take a more proactive role in leveraging and negotiating with governments to ensure that migrants can safely return to their home countries.

In this regard, both the international community and AU should make better use of existing instruments rather than trying to reinvent the wheel. The 2015 Joint Valletta Plan of Action, for example, adopted by African and European leaders, prioritises youth skills development, which could be key to stemming migration flows. However, the initiative has since largely been neglected. If the plan is to get off the ground, Cochetel noted that the business community could prove particularly essential as a government partner in ensuring that the needs of the labour market are reflected in training and education programmes. To this end, the Centre of Practical Skills (CoPS), based in Enugu and managed by ICMPD in partnership with Godfrey Okoye University and European private sector partners, provides a model that could be adopted elsewhere. The Centre teams up with partner companies in Enugu to offer dual education and marketable vocational training for Nigerian youth. In acknowledging that the majority of mixed-migration movements take place within rather than beyond Africa, initiatives should also be directed toward incorporating whole-of-migration-route approaches and supporting countries in working with their neighbours to address root concerns and/or ensuring safe migration.



“We need to start with the recognition that most of the mixed migration is South-South rather than South-North.”

Vincent Cochetel

Security, for one, must be put at the forefront of international measures, with an emphasis on demilitarisation and the demobilisation of armed groups in the Central Mediterranean region. The flourishing human trafficking economy in Libya, for example, has been spurred by the lack of effective state structures in the country's southern regions. This de facto vacuum has enabled militant groups and criminal gangs from Chad and Sudan to gain a foothold and exploit migrants through illicit trafficking. Greater attention must be paid to building up community resilience and developing sustainable economic alternatives in the region.

The plight of migrants enduring dire conditions in detention centres in Libya also warrants immediate attention. Cochetel underlined that the onus must be placed on using various channels and platforms, including the Tripartite Taskforce of the AU, EU, and UN, to persuade Tripoli to end the exploitation and abuse of migrants. While

the return of migrants and the securing of borders, as envisioned by a June 2018 “quartet agreement” between Libya, Chad, Niger, and Sudan, could be part of the solution, one-sided approaches focused solely on these issues must be resisted. Rather, any strategy should emphasise common interests. This entails a recognition of the importance of migrants to Libya's economic development (around 80 per cent of the 600 000 migrants in Libya are already employed) and the provision of work permits for those seeking them. It also means ensuring that neighbouring countries can re-absorb substantial population flows without further deleterious socio-economic impacts.

→ Watch the full panel discussion!



Partnerships in action

Connecting the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan Routes

The EU has been challenged by mixed-migration flows across the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes for years. Though the peak periods of the pandemic saw a decline in these movements, irregular migration is once again on the rise.

On stage Notis Mitarachi, Minister for Migration and Asylum, Greece
 Selmo Cikotić, Minister of Security, Bosnia and Herzegovina
 Péter Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Hungary
 Moderation Michael Spindelegger, Director General, ICMPD

The number of unauthorised crossings in the Western Balkans more than doubled between 2020 and 2021. Against this backdrop, the panel elicited different perspectives and strategies towards addressing irregular migration in the region and opportunities for building migration partnerships along and across these routes. The session, moderated by ICMPD Director General Michael Spindelegger, included as panellists Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó; Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Minister of Security, Selmo Cikotić; and Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum Notis Mitarachi.

Partnerships on migration management, notably, are valued by all. Szijjártó, for example, welcomed the participation of Czech border police in the management of Hungary’s borders. He noted that Hungarian border police, in turn, have been able to support Greece in securing its borders as part of a Frontex mission and they also assist technical operations in

“Our part of the world has historical, geographical, cultural and civilizational meaning, linking Europe and Asia. We believe that in terms of migration, we do have a role to play. We are trying to have a more and more comprehensive and better integrated approach with our neighbours.”

Selmo Cikotić

Serbia and North Macedonia. Cikotić, for his part, emphasised the progress made in reducing irregular transit flows through the country and the critical role that logistical support from the EU delegation in Serbia played in this effort. There is still space for intensifying partnerships, though—Cikotić advocated that the EU and Western Balkans focus on harmonising standards and practices to secure better protection of borders. Szijjártó, meanwhile, pointed to the stalled EU accession negotiations of Western Balkan countries as a roadblock to joint action.

Opinion on the extent to which the EU should be sovereign over migration matters, however, remains divided. Mitarachi backed the EU taking a more prominent part in migration policy to ensure a holistic approach that accounts for the multi-faceted nature of the topic and the connections between primary and secondary flows. He sees a specific niche for the bloc in standardising the securing of its external borders



and advancing an external migration policy that includes but also extends beyond the conventional issue of returns. Mitarachi stressed that it is vitally important, however, that neighbouring countries do not feel excluded or face any undue pressure if agreements on return are to be reached. The EU, he suggested, should therefore also prioritise the establishment of partnerships with neighbourhood countries that include legal pathways for migration and the elimination of smuggling networks. Szijjártó, by contrast, reiterated Hungary's ardent opposition to migration quotas and expressed scepticism about an EU role in negotiating legal pathways and setting migration policy more generally. Szijjártó pushed instead for Member States to maintain their competencies on these matters.

"We need to ensure that countries in the neighbourhood do not face undue pressure from the European Union's stronger stance against illegal migration."

Notis Mitarachi

The panel also shined a spotlight on the need to make European populaces a central partner on migration in the future, with societal buy-in key if migration measures are to prove sustainable. The populist wave across Europe following the 2015 migration flows still profoundly weighs on the minds of policymakers. Mitarachi pointed to illegal human smuggling activities as one factor undergirding negative public sentiment on migration. Another concerns public perceptions that migrants not entitled to protection are remaining in Europe rather than returning to their home countries.


But an off ramp exists. Mitarachi called for governments to expedite the review of asylum applications to ensure the fair and speedy integration of people entitled to stay and the safe and dignified return of those not permitted. Regional partnerships in the neighbourhood that ensure human

"Our principal position is that we have to bring help where it is needed in order to change circumstances in a way which enables those who have been living there to stay there, rather than being forced to leave."

Péter Szijjártó

smuggling networks escape impunity, undoubtedly, should be integral to resolving these deficits, too. These measures should be paired with clear government communication with the public every step of the way. If European mechanisms on migration are credible, the public, Mitarachi asserted, will be more receptive to migrants more generally. As a case in point, he spotlighted the recent arrival in Athens of more than 700 female judges, lawmakers, journalists, and lawyers from Afghanistan, and the supportive response from all segments of society to this, admittedly special, arrangement. Mitarachi further underscored that success in enforcing borders and averting irregular migration could enable the bloc to win over the public, lend it additional capacity to host refugees, and become a more active participant in resettlement schemes. Failure to turn around public moods, by contrast, could jeopardise important initiatives that aim to either welcome refugees on a humanitarian basis or attract migrants from the neighbourhood and beyond to address labour market shortages.

→ Watch the full panel discussion!



Migration crisis management at the EU's external borders: Geopolitics, preparedness and responses



On stage Nina Gregori, Executive Director, European Asylum Support Office
 Vladimír Šimoňák, Director, Crisis Management Department, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Slovakia
 Johannes Luchner, Deputy Director-General, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission
 Moderation Ralph Genetzke, Director, Brussels Mission, ICMPD

The significant influx of migrants and refugees into the EU in 2015 underlined shortcomings in the EU's Common European Asylum System and its overall migration management framework. In September 2020, as a comprehensive response to these challenges, the European Commission presented the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, a detailed roadmap towards coherent policies in the areas of migration, asylum, integration, border management, and cooperation with third countries.

One year on from its launch, panellists debated whether the EU was better prepared to manage crises at the EU's external borders. What tools does the EU now have at its disposal and are they fit for purpose? How do experts assess the EU's existing partnerships and how can these relationships be better honed? To what extent and through which mechanisms should the EU seek to assert itself geopolitically on migration? The panel included contributions from Vladimír Šimoňák, Director of the Crisis Management Department at the Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs; Johannes Luchner, Deputy Director-General of the EU Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs; and Nina Gregori, Executive Director of the European Asylum Support Office. The session was moderated by ICMPD Brussels Mission Director Ralph Genetzke.

The dialogue reiterated a common refrain from the conference, namely that partnerships, be they internal or external, must be a two-way street and premised on trust. On the external dimension, for example, achieving effective bilateral cooperation on

the issue of returns and readmissions has long eluded the EU and its Member States. Luchner stressed that progress on returns will require the EU to demonstrate that it is a fair-and-foul-weather partner committed to bolstering the administrative capacities of third-country governments and the resilience of societies through development aid aimed at addressing the root causes of migration. If the socio-economic climate is improved and opportunity provided in countries of origin, furthermore, the impetus compelling prospective migrants to repeatedly embark on dangerous attempts to reach Europe would also be allayed for some. The New Pact, for its part, marks a step towards reflecting a balanced approach internally, according to Luchner, by seeking to build trust among Member States.

The EU's evolving technological toolkit on migration, meanwhile, was labelled by panellists a "game changer" in managing migration. As the bloc awaits novel digital tools set to come online in 2023, Šimoňák pointed to the success of Eurodac and the integrated political crisis response arrangements as indicative of the potential opportunities at the EU's disposal. The latter instrument has been essential to facilitating constructive dialogue between Member States on concrete topics and averting misunderstandings as they seek to navigate both internal and external crises. Gregori further emphasised that the interoperability of different European IT systems will improve efficiency and empower EASO to provide technical assistance to Member States. This interoperability could aid in establishing accurate data on asylum seekers in Europe and more generally ensuring expeditious and effective asylum procedures that address backlogs. The digitalisation of asylum procedures through remote application protocols, spurred by the pandemic, will continue to pay dividends, too.

While emerging technologies can open new doors regarding migration management, these opportunities can only be seized if institutional structures are put in place



that work in tandem. Thus, the EASO's transition into the EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA) with an expanded remit was lauded by panellists. Gregori welcomed the fact that the new reserve pool mechanism, for example, will enable EUAA to immediately deploy experts in crisis situations and provide operational assistance and support to Member States. Additionally, the agency's new status will further enable it to bring experts onto the payroll and deploy liaison officers both to Member States and third countries. These measures will all lend additional flexibility, contingency planning, and preparedness to the EASO/EUAA's activities and enable the bloc to become more agile in responding to global developments.

Though the Commission has declared its aspiration to pursue geopolitical ambitions, the place that migration may play in this agenda remains uncertain. The EU would, however, benefit if the internal and external dimensions work in concert with one another here, too. A consensus prevails that the EU acts stronger together—when it speaks with one voice, it is able to wield outsized leverage (as the EU's robust and effective response to the crisis at its borders with Belarus has demonstrated). Šimoňák remarked that the EU should tread carefully, nevertheless, in its external partnerships to ensure it does not abandon its vital interests or surrender its ambition of strategic autonomy when establishing

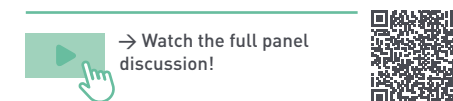
"We need to transition away from the lip service of partnership into actual partnership. For returns, it means providing people opportunity in their home countries... It also means aiding host countries or countries of origin mired by weak administrative capacities."

Johannes Luchner

"The IPCR came online and made many of the debates that ministers and even leaders have been engaging in considerably more constructive, much more focused on the actual situation on the ground and not on mutual suspicions between participants."

Vladimír Šimoňák

relevant partnerships. Numerous tools should be on the table—one path suggested would see the EU use resettlement as a strategic instrument that could unlock cooperation on an array of issues. Member States, Šimoňák advised, may also want to revisit the assignment of the migration partnership portfolio. Interior ministries are typically entrusted with migration management, but foreign ministries are more culturally accustomed to sustaining extended dialogues and are equipped with a greater arsenal of diplomatic tools. Foreign policy officials, therefore, are well placed to take on a greater role in forging migration partnerships with counterparts, relationships that could also streamline and ready migration management for crises before they appear.



→ Watch the full panel discussion!



Charting forward in a changing global landscape: An armchair debate on Europe's geopolitical challenges

On stage Caroline de Gruyter, Correspondent for European Affairs, NRC Handelsblad
Sébastien Lumet, Director Brussels Office, Groupe d'études géopolitiques, and Editor for Le Grand Continent
Moderation Hugo Brady, Senior Strategic Advisor, ICMPD

Every year the VMC deliberately steps back from migration policy challenges to take a hard look at the changing geopolitical picture facing Europe. At VMC 2020, Martin Selmayr and Ivan Krastev debated the EU's performance in the pandemic amongst other global challenges. For VMC 2021, moderator Hugo Brady, Senior Strategic Advisor at ICMPD, tasked two agenda-setting thinkers with deconstructing the well-entrenched idea that the EU may soon cease to exist entirely, in a world where non-Western, non-democratic powers seem to be in the ascendant, and where the international order often appears in decay.

Caroline de Gruyter is a veteran EU commentator, correspondent for European Affairs for NRC Handelsblad, and author of a widely regarded recent book in Dutch and German (English translation: "It doesn't get any better: The EU and the Hapsburg Empire"). Her book offers a refreshingly original thesis, comparing the crisis management style of one of the world's longest-lasting, multi-cultural empires with the EU's own penchant for "muddling through" (which the Hapsburgs called "fortwursteln"). But, as De Gruyter told the full room, the similarities are encouraging, rather than unflattering. The EU—also a multi-national, multi-lingual polity—has weathered successive crises, such as Brexit, better than most realise or expected, exhibiting flexibility, tight organisation, and a determined will to survive. Just as fundamentally, despite significant internal opposition and weaknesses, the Union remains too valuable as a "roof over their head" for other member countries to risk walking away in uncertain times. For outsiders, the pull to membership remains significant.

To complement this, Sébastien Lumet, Brussels Director of the Groupe d'études géopolitiques and Le Grand Continent.eu, seemed to represent in his own person a rising sentiment amongst a young generation of Europeans ready to leave national chauvinism behind in exchange for stronger

"European sovereignty". While a retreat (for now) from enlargement has certainly resulted in Europe losing significant agency to influence its immediate neighbourhood, the bloc is also increasingly serious about leveraging its clout in defence of collective interests using both positive and negative incentives. Suddenly, Brussels is talking "the language of power"—to quote its High Representative for Foreign Policy—through exercises like the Global Gateway Strategy to the Strategic Compass. The Union has also shown itself not only resilient to the pandemic but has used the episode to take ostentatious steps forward in integration through the Next Generation EU (including its €720 billion Recovery and Resilience Facility) and European Green Deal programmes.

"Neutrality, of course, is not the highest good. How can we be neutral when certain values or our good friends are attacked?"

Caroline de Gruyter

For Lumet, the next step in today’s increasingly dramatic geopolitical scene is for the Union to elaborate a “grand strategy” to protect and secure its interests. Agreement would somehow have to accommodate sharply different threat perceptions within the Union and weigh European power against that of the other global players including, among others, China, the US, and Russia. To stand the test of time, a grand strategy also needs to be a grand bargain between the Union’s federalist and nationalist elements. Inevitably, the EU Council’s unanimity rule on foreign policy matters will come under the spotlight in such a process as it means that, while agreed approaches have common support, they are often drained of clarity and substance in order to be adopted.

option for a bloc the size of the EU, as it will be dragged into taking stances on different issues by default.

The EU’s habitual hesitancy to wade into foreign policy matters until absolutely necessary needs to be rethought, with more emphasis on anticipating global shifts—such as regime change in Afghanistan—rather than merely reacting to them. A greater ability to identify, balance, and deliver on its different interests is key to making the EU a reliable partner in the agreements it is eagerly seeking with partner countries on the issue of migration. Grand strategy also means considering interests and ambitions alongside likely risk scenarios and using compromise and foresight to broker future approaches to

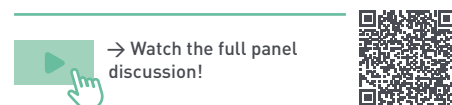


“The debate on European strategic autonomy is healthy. It matters less what you think about European strategic autonomy than the fact that there is a debate on this issue. These confrontations are healthy because if we can decide together the ends that we want to reach, then we are better prepared to design external means to confront those together.”

Sébastien Lumet

The outlook is actually more positive than many assume. Lumet pointed to the EU’s recent declaration of China as a geopolitical competitor in several fields, its adoption of trade defence instruments, and its deepening military-security identity. The annual release of the Strategic Foresight Report assesses Europe’s capacity and freedom to act in different strategic areas in accordance with global trends, emerging issues, and geopolitical shifts. And the EU’s new Arctic policy, China doctrine, and Indo-Pacific Strategy all underscore the extension of its voice into different areas of policy. The panellists agreed: Neutrality is not an

achieving strategic autonomy. Despite the weightiness of the topic, and some pointed interventions from the floor, the session concluded with much good humour and the acknowledgement that Europe’s strategic significance as a global player remains, with clear indications of the Union’s continued vitality and relevance going forward.



The Silk Routes in focus

International responses to the unfolding situation in Afghanistan



On stage Khyber Farahi, former Senior Adviser on Migration Affairs and Development to former Afghan President Ghani / independent expert
 Kevin J. Allen, Principal Liaison Adviser, Asia and the Pacific, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
 Savaş Ünlü, Director General, Directorate General of Migration Management, Turkey
 Joost Klarenbeek, Special Envoy for Migration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands

Moderation Sedef Dearing, Head of Silk Routes Region, ICMPD

The recent turmoil in Afghanistan has uprooted the country's socio-economic underpinnings, with the risks of a lengthy humanitarian catastrophe exceedingly high. Concerns that minority groups and women could face persecution under the new Taliban de facto government are palpable. A significant exodus of Afghans, meanwhile, could further hamper the country's ability to recover and rebuild.

Neighbouring countries were already hosting millions of Afghan refugees even before this latest upheaval. And nearly 10 per cent of Afghans—around 3.5 million people—are internally displaced due to conflict and/or human rights violations. Complementing the spotlight session on Afghanistan, which put an emphasis on perspectives from the immediate neighbourhood, this panel explored international and European responses to the unfolding situation and assessed the part that partnerships may play in addressing the near and longer term needs of displaced populations and hosting countries in the region. Panellists included Khyber Farahi, former Senior Adviser on Migration Affairs and Development to the Afghan President; Savaş Ünlü, Director General for the Directorate General for Migration Management at the Turkish Ministry of Interior; Joost Klarenbeek, Special Envoy for Migration at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and Kevin J. Allen, Principal Liaison Adviser for Asia and the Pacific at UNHCR. The session was moderated by Sedef Dearing, ICMPD Head of Silk Routes Region.

Afghanistan's tumult has raised concerns that a considerable amount of investment put into the country's development over the past couple decades will be squandered. However, panellists emphasised that the frameworks and legacies of some initiatives have not entirely fallen by the wayside yet, and should not necessarily be discarded.

“By doing the right thing when it comes to having a robust migration management system, but with safeguards and by providing access to asylum to those who may make it to your borders - that sends the right message to Iran and Pakistan.”

Kevin J. Allen

Farahi singled out the apolitical Community Development Councils (CDCs), which were developed across 35 000 villages as part of the Citizen's Charter Programme (CCNPP), as an initiative that could potentially be preserved. The elected CDCs, which have spent over €1.5 billion since 2003, facilitate locally devised projects that meet, for example, the infrastructure, water, agricultural, and electricity needs of community members. CCNPP also focused on the needs for the reintegration of returnees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and host communities. The Maintenance and Construction Grant initiative of CCNPP was designed to create livelihood opportunities, not only for returnees and IDPs but also for their host communities. These functions could prove pivotal in ensuring that services continue to reach women and promote their mobility despite a hostile political climate.

UNHCR's Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, previously integrated into the Afghanistan Development Program, was mentioned by Allen as a similar initiative that could have staying power. The programme, premised on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, aims to stabilise communities and alleviate migratory push factors. This stability is essential for facilitating the voluntary return and reintegration of IDPs and averting potential flows from arising in the first place. The initiative has seen 40 locales labelled as



“Burden sharing is not just about providing financial support. That is not a fair understanding. It should also include a working resettlement system. The current one has some deficiencies.”


Savaş Ünlü

priority areas of return and integration, a status that grants them access to funding for community-oriented education, health, and livelihood projects. The fact that over 100 000 of the 660 000 IDPs from conflict in 2021, as of October, had returned even in a turbulent year is a testament to the merits of the programme, Allen stressed. However, its continued success, he added, will be contingent on the participation of development aid partners like the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank.

It is this development aid or “humanitarian plus” component, panellists concluded, that poses a major quandary for the international community. Allen stressed that the risk of substantial cross-border movements and

the internal displacement of Afghans will continue to persist if adequate government services, such as education, healthcare, and a basic functioning economy, are not guaranteed. The international community, including financial institutions, undoubtedly, will be essential to providing the minimally necessary levels of cash liquidity to restore confidence and keep Afghanistan from the brink of collapse. Yet, the provision of these funds is not at all straightforward.

While a consensus prevails that humanitarian aid must continue to flow to Afghanistan with minimal conditionality, positions on development aid are more ambiguous and undergirded by concerns that funds may legitimise the Taliban. Klarenbeek noted that the Netherlands accompanies its humanitarian aid with a request that human rights be respected. But a higher standard governs its provision of development aid, such that the “kind of things that you ask kindly in case of humanitarian assistance really become conditions.” This distinction was also acknowledged by Farahi—he cautioned that education assistance, for example, must be predicated on the inclusion of girls and a satisfactory curriculum. Meanwhile, projects aimed at developing infrastructure, like water and sanitation, must be free from political or financial interference from the

 @LeoBrincat
Oct 20, 2021

The Silk Routes in focus @ #ViennaMigConf : Regional responses to the unfolding situation in Afghanistan - high level discussion on possible responses to the situation there & in neighboring countries + implications for migration partnerships in the region.





“You can’t expect the families of women who have had new hopes and dreams in the last twenty years to just live in Afghanistan for nothing, for a future that they won’t have, and basically become invisible.”

Khyber Farahi

Taliban. The panellists emphasised that workarounds could involve collaboration with international organisations and community-based groups in distributing aid and implementing projects to prevent the capture of funds by the Taliban. The striking of these types of balanced arrangements, importantly, will rely on sustaining constructive dialogue with the Taliban’s de facto government. These discussions must also prioritise the security of aid workers and the rights of both male and female staff to deliver assistance. Panellists, additionally, reaffirmed that assistance should be provided to countries in the region that are taking on the greatest responsibility in hosting refugees and distributing significant humanitarian aid. This support should focus on capacity building, operational cooperation, and financial assistance. Ünlü pointed to the extraordinary costs incurred by Turkey in hosting four million refugees (3.7 million Syrians and 300 000 Afghans) and administering basic needs for millions

“There has got to be international burden sharing. We all have the interest. At the same time, we all have our populations to convince—and that’s true everywhere—but we have to do it together and it has to work both ways.”

Joost Klarenbeek

of people in different regions of Syria. Though the matter of return is currently on hold pending developments in Afghanistan, UNHCR can be an integral partner in this process through the Quadripartite Group composed of the UN agency alongside Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Allen highlighted that the UNHCR also provides capacity support to Iran, Pakistan, and Tajikistan for the screening of asylum seekers and the processing of cases.

The international community must also boost its participation in resettlement programmes and foster the creation of legal migration pathways. More than 100 000 Afghans have already been evacuated by allied countries for resettlement, primarily through evacuation flights in August. But present estimates, according to Allen, indicate the need for an additional 85 000 resettlement spaces for Afghan refugees globally over the next five years. Resettlement should be used as a tool to provide protection to refugees who are vulnerable in their current host country or to share the burden more equitably with major refugee-hosting countries. The willingness of Europe to do this, even as it enforces stringent border management, will also be strategically important in signalling international solidarity to Iran and Pakistan. Governments and civil society can further play an instrumental role in building the resilience of the Afghan diaspora by facilitating the integration of migrants in their host communities and ensuring refugees’ access to services including bank accounts, higher education, and opportunities to start businesses. These measures will help ensure that the well-being of Afghan refugees are safeguarded even as the future road for Afghanistan itself remains uncertain and the post-conflict recovery precarious.

→ Watch the full panel discussion!

The Mediterranean in focus

Joint leadership and shared responsibility for a revitalised approach to partnership

On stage Neville Aquilina, Director General, Global Issues, International Development and Economic Affairs, Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs, Malta
 H.E. Christophe Léonzi, Ambassador for Migration, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, France
 Hamida Rais, Director General, International Cooperation on Migration, Ministry of Social Affairs, Tunisia
 Ulrich Weinbrenner, Director General, Directorate-General of Migration, Refugees and Return Policy, Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, Germany
 Moderation Julien Simon, Head of Mediterranean Region, ICMPD



Multiple initiatives have been established in the Mediterranean in recent years to bolster the region’s migration governance capacity. But these arrangements now find themselves in need of renewal and revitalisation after taking a backseat during the pandemic. The intensifying socio-economic ramifications of the virus give special impetus to the matter. Considering these developments and the EU’s New Agenda for the Mediterranean, this panel assessed migration cooperation and current policy priorities and opportunities in the region.

Julien Simon, Head of the Mediterranean Region at ICMPD, moderated the session. He was joined by Hamida Rais, Director General of International Cooperation on Migration at the Tunisian Ministry of Social Affairs; Neville Aquilina, Director General of Global Issues, International Development and Economic Affairs at the Maltese Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs; Ulrich Weinbrenner, Director General of the Directorate-General of Migration, Refugees and Return Policy at the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community; and Christophe Léonzi, Ambassador for Migration at the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

The modernisation and professionalisation of migration governance was put front and centre throughout the discussion. Rais emphasised that adequate administrative capabilities are pivotal for reacting to crisis situations, developing coherent migration strategies, and implementing and assessing action plans. These standards can be strengthened through the institutionalisation of open, continuous, and routine dialogue among partners. On this point, Aquilina pointed to the promising new ICMPD Training Institute on Migration Capacity Partnership for the Mediterranean based in Valletta. This permanent and

“It is especially important from both a German and EU perspective that we not jump from one crisis to another... but that we have a long-term strategy and follow our strategy because dealing with migration and improving the situation is something that takes extensive effort and that cannot be carried out in just a few years.”

Ulrich Weinbrenner

accredited Institute will provide a shared space for migration actors from government and civil society on both shores of the Mediterranean to develop relevant technical know-how and capacities, exchange best practices, and foster trust. Technological tools, Weinbrenner underlined, will be crucial, too. The Migration 4.0 concept, discussed during Germany’s EU Presidency, heeds the growing importance of the digital transformation in managing migration. The concept is premised on sharing, standardising, and streamlining technical information and data from EU Member States to better forecast migration flows and manage these movements. The improved use of digital tools can crucially prevent false information from seeping in, avert misunderstandings, and enhance communication between partners.

Panellists all agreed that the necessary building blocks for effective migration cooperation are already present—but the time for implementation is far overdue. The EU, for example, has developed a series of strategic documents, action plans, and instruments on migration that address the issue both thematically and regionally. The Joint Valletta Action Plan, for one, presents the framework necessary for mutually beneficial cooperation drawing on the

know-how and capabilities of each partner to foster common ground. It could, if more broadly applied, remedy the EU’s tendency to jump from one migration crisis to the next without a long-term strategy.

The Team Europe vehicle, moreover, has demonstrated the potential to facilitate the exchange of best practices and joint action. This mechanism could be extended to regional cooperation, for example, through the Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) to combat human smuggling and criminal networks that threaten the rule of law. Léonzi, similarly, emphasised the need for EU assistance to third-country programmes, for instance, in Tunisia aimed at border protection and/or the dignified return of migrants to sub-Saharan Africa. The EU, though, must also learn the language of geopolitics.



“We will open the Migration Capacity Partnerships Training Institute in Malta this year— This will give us a way to talk about migration in a similar language with our European and Mediterranean counterparts and engage productively together.”
Neville Aquilina



“Cooperation on migration has been strongly impacted by the pandemic and its economic and social consequences... We need to get moving on a constructive path again in a context that was set back by the COVID-19 crisis.”
Christophe Léonzi

Here, one option would be to employ powerful incentives at its disposal, including the Blue Card and visa facilitation procedures to make partnerships more enticing and effective. Despite some shortcomings that need to be redressed, the EU-Turkey deal, according to Weinbrenner, provides a template that could be used for similar agreements with other countries in the Mediterranean.

On certain topics, like smuggling and human trafficking, a whole-of-region arrangement will be necessary. But approaches that incorporate a more limited range of actors should be used when certain routes or issues only particularly interest specific actors. The 5+5 Dialogue on Migration in the Western Mediterranean, for example, promotes political dialogue and economic cooperation on migration related issues between five EU Member States (Spain,

@PetraDankova
Oct 20, 2021

Thank you @ICMPD – #ViennaMigConf gave me a distilled picture of policy and political developments around #migrationpartnerships incl. voices normally not present in my “bubble” – vital for my research on transnational #socialwork and EU migration management externalization



“To manage migration better, we need more innovative partnerships. We need modern administration that is able to act quickly in times of crisis and develop effective migration policies.”

Hamida Rais

France, Italy, Malta, and Portugal) and five from the southern shore (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, and Tunisia).

Diaspora communities, often a source of expertise and knowledge regarding their countries of origin, could be yet another under-utilised resource, particularly when it comes to addressing the root causes of migration and facilitating return and reintegration. Entrepreneurs from the migrant community may often prove willing, for instance, to contribute their skills and assets to supporting investment and development in their countries of origin. But governments on both ends must lend greater backing to these initiatives, including through increased organisational support. Rais identified the organisation of forums that connect relevant Tunisian elected officials throughout the world and the development of municipality-diaspora networks as promising initiatives. And in Germany, the “African Nation” diaspora, backed financially by the Ministry of Interior, has stepped in to provide counselling services regarding returns. Weinbrenner cautioned,

though, that the diversity of diaspora communities must be acknowledged. A tripartite structure, Léonzi suggested, could be one way to streamline this engagement. Migration will command renewed attention, Léonzi assured, during France’s EU presidency in the first half of 2022, against the backdrop of a post-pandemic transition that could see heightened irregular arrivals. And the Mediterranean, he emphasised, will be integral to the success or failure of the EU’s migration policy. If a more modern and professional migration system, based on joint leadership and shared responsibility between and among both governments and civil societies, is fostered, the region could be left in a better position to address migration-related challenges and improve the resilience of countries of origin, transit, and destination.

→ Watch the full panel discussion!



What works and what doesn't: Closing reflections on the future of migration partnerships



VMC 2021, over nearly two days of intense discussions, saw government officials, experts, and practitioners shine a light on Europe’s central migration-related challenges and opportunities. This reflection came only a month after the European Court of Auditors published a broad-ranging special report on EU cooperation with third countries on the return and readmission of irregular migrants.

On stage Leo Brincat, Member, European Court of Auditors
 Lukas Gehrke, Deputy Director General and Director Policy, Research and Strategy, ICMPD
 Monika Sie Dhian Ho, General Director, Clingendael Institute
 Raoul Ueberecken, Director, Directorate Home Affairs, Directorate-General Justice and Home Affairs, General Secretariat, Council of the European Union

The final session combined the main thematic strands of the conference with the report's main recommendations into a few core takeaways that, if heeded, could significantly advance the continent's migration relations with its neighbours. Participants included Leo Brincat, Member of the European Court of Auditors; Raoul Ueberecken, Director of the Directorate Home Affairs at DG Justice and Home Affairs; and Monika Sie Dhian Ho, General Director of the Clingendael Institute. The session was moderated by Lukas Gehrke, ICMPD Deputy Director General and Director of Policy, Research, and Strategy.

The call for a more holistic approach to migration partnerships was a common refrain throughout the conference, and the panel further reinforced this message. New strategies must reflect migration as an inter-dependent policy issue. The five pillars identified in the Joint Valletta Action Plan already provide an excellent framework—they need now to be applied in a comprehensive manner. Action is needed, in other words, to tackle the root causes of migration in countries of origin, offer opportunities for legal migration and mobility, ensure the proper administration of asylum and international protection procedures, prevent migrant smuggling and trafficking, and increase returns through the effective reintegration of irregular migrants. Europe's slow progress on securing return and readmission agreements is a case in point. If the bloc wants to reinvigorate stalled negotiations, it must place greater emphasis on the needs of countries of origin, including the barriers that respective governments face in reintegrating migrants and selling negotiated deals to their parliaments. Further European support for public employment offices in partner countries, Sie Dhian Ho suggested, would be a step in the right direction. These offices have logged notable success (Tunisia is one example) in assisting returning migrants to locate job opportunities and reintegrate into society. Access to robust data is also crucial to understanding the

“Emphasis on talent partnerships is a constructive notion in the migration pact. We should not underestimate how important politically it is to have legal pathways in the package and make them work.”

Monika Sie Dhian Ho



forces that drive migration, the sustainability of readmission and reintegration programmes, and spotting sustainable ways to increase returns. While some progress is in evidence, Brincat cautioned that the submission of data to competent authorities is not always timely or regular, nor is it always comparable across Member States. Investment, therefore, must still be put into ensuring uniform reporting systems that facilitate efficient analysis and effective use of data by EU authorities. This data sharing should be extended, when feasible, to partners. Ueberecken, for example, mentioned Europol as an institution which, to its detriment, has been prohibited from sharing information with partners that could aid it in strengthening its international networks for combatting smugglers.

A clearer understanding of the relationship between irregular flows and the availability of legal migration pathways is also paramount. The EU faces real labour shortages, especially in the digital sector. It would be prudent, therefore, for the Union to develop initiatives that proactively seek to develop education and skills training in partner countries. Importantly, public employment offices could play a facilitating

role in recruiting and connecting prospective migrants to employers in receiving countries in Europe. A whole-of-society approach, however, should be adopted to bring together governments (including development, economic affairs, education, and labour ministries), employers, and migrants in both destination and origin countries to ensure that programmes match skills development with workforce needs. It is vital, furthermore, that this mobility does not exacerbate, for example, Africa's problems with the loss of its skills (i.e. “brain-drain”). Europe, therefore, should train significantly more people than are likely to migrate. Sie Dhian Ho suggested that the extension of circular migration approaches could prove beneficial herein. These arrangements in the Netherlands, for instance, have enabled IT companies to train and employ Nigerians and Senegalese who work remotely from their home countries. The contracts further incorporate circular elements through regular, though often temporary, stays in the Netherlands to facilitate workplace cohesion.

The shift towards a more holistic approach will also require better and more regular dialogue between Brussels and national governments. The present inability of the bloc to identify synergies among its Member States has contributed to its weakened posture in negotiating partnership agreements. This is not limited to the observation that the EU often fails to speak with one voice. It may, in fact, sometimes speak with one voice yet still undercut its position and weaken its bargaining power with partner countries. For this purpose, panellists proposed the appointment of a European migration coordinator tasked with bringing together different stakeholders (government, civil society, and private alike) to foster discussion, build trust, pin down shared objectives, and ensure that the EU's common action plans are implemented. Although not an original idea, appointing a migration coordinator could further shore up confidence in migration partnerships through routine meetings and visits with

“Each time the migration issue comes to the fore, one has the impression that the answer from the Brussels machinery is to draw up another paper. But what leaders want to see is more action.”

Raoul Ueberecken



foreign officials. The coordinated approach modelled by Michel Barnier's Brexit negotiations team, Ueberecken suggested, could serve as a blueprint.

The panel concluded on an optimistic note, welcoming the fact that governments continue to assign urgency to the matter. Brincat, for one, indicated that the Court of Auditors may supplement his recent report with further enquiries on legal pathways, an issue in which there is significant interest but not a great deal of conceptual understanding. Sie Dhian Ho pointed to surveys indicating significant public backing for legal migration yet declining support for asylum seekers with no claim, meaning such support could wane if irregular migration comes to be conflated with migration more broadly (as has proved the case with asylum). Consequently, governments can and must deliver partnerships designed in such a way that they deliver benefits to both sides of the migration equation.

“Although it is not the be-all end-all, an effective and well-managed readmission policy is an essential component to a comprehensive migration policy.”

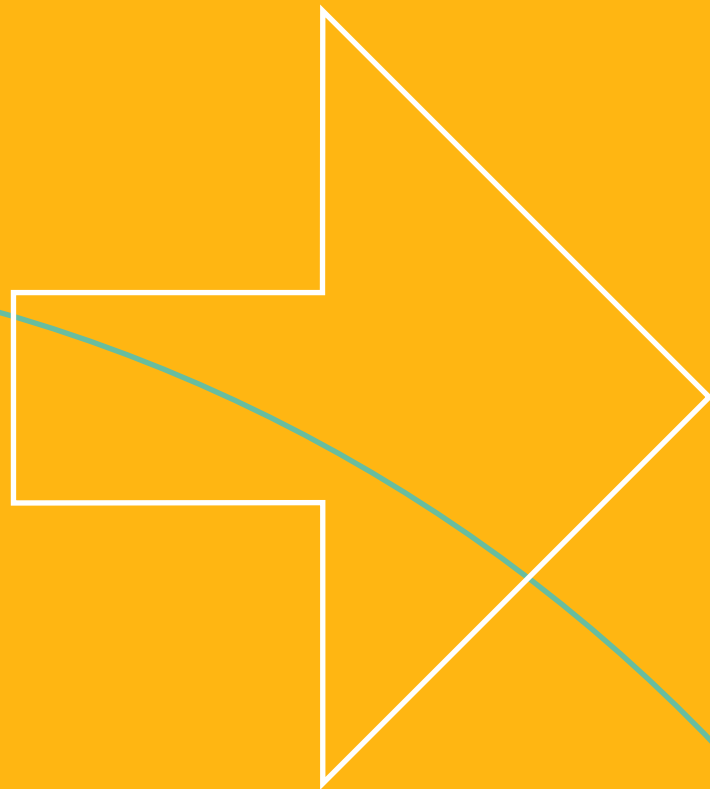
Leo Brincat

→ Watch the full panel discussion!



③

SPEAKERS





Michael Spindelegger
Director General
International Centre for
Migration Policy Development



Karl Nehammer
Federal Minister
Federal Ministry of the Interior
Austria



Malin Frankenhaeuser
Head of Policy
International Centre for
Migration Policy Development



Martijn Pluim
Director, Migration Dialogues
and Cooperation
International Centre for
Migration Policy Development



Notis Mitarachi
Minister
Ministry of Migration and Asylum
Greece



Selmo Cikotić
Minister
Ministry of Security
Bosnia and Herzegovina



H.E. Dr Abdullah Abdullah
Chairman
High Council for National Reconciliation
of Afghanistan



Sharaf Sheralizoda
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Tajikistan



H.E. Abbas Bagherpour Ardekani
Ambassador
Embassy of the Islamic Republic
of Iran in Vienna



Péter Szijjártó
Minister
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Hungary



Nina Gregori
Executive Director
European Asylum Support Office



Vladimír Šimoňák
Director, Crisis Management
Department
Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs
Slovakia



H.E. Ahmet Muhtar Gün
Ambassador and Permanent
Representative
Permanent Mission of the Republic of
Turkey to the United Nations and
International Organizations in Vienna



H.E. Amira El Fadil
Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian
Affairs and Social Development
African Union Commission



Vincent Cochetel
Special Envoy of the UNHCR for the
Central Mediterranean situation
United Nations High Commissioner
for Refugees



Johannes Luchner
Deputy Director General,
Directorate-General for Migration
and Home Affairs
European Commission



Ralph Genetzke
Director, Brussels Mission
International Centre for
Migration Policy Development



Caroline de Gruyter
Correspondent for European Affairs
NRC Handelsblad



Sébastien Lumet
Director Brussels Office
Groupe d'études géopolitiques, and
Editor for Le Grand Continent



Hugo Brady
Senior Strategic Advisor
International Centre for
Migration Policy Development



Khyber Farahi
Independent expert and former
Senior Adviser on
Migration Affairs and Development
to former Afghan President Ghani



Ulrich Weinbrenner
Director General, Directorate-General of
Migration, Refugees and Return Policy
Federal Ministry of the Interior,
Building and Community
Germany



H.E. Christophe Léonzi
Ambassador for Migration
Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs
France



Julien Simon
Head of Mediterranean Region
International Centre for
Migration Policy Development



Savaş Ünlü
Director General, Directorate General
for Migration Management
Ministry of Interior
Turkey



Joost Klarenbeek
Special Envoy for Migration
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Netherlands



Kevin J. Allen
Principal Liaison Adviser,
Asia and the Pacific
United Nations High Commissioner
for Refugees



Leo Brincat
Member
European Court of Auditors



Lukas Gehrke
Deputy Director General and Director
Policy, Research and Strategy
International Centre for
Migration Policy Development



Monika Sie Dhian Ho
General Director
Clingendael Institute



Sedef Dearing
Head of Silk Routes Region
International Centre for
Migration Policy Development



Hamida Rais
Director General, International
Cooperation on Migration
Ministry of Social Affairs
Tunisia



Neville Aquilina
Director General, Global Issues,
International Development and
Economic Affairs
Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs
Malta



Raoul Ueberecken
Director, Directorate Home Affairs,
Directorate-General Justice and Home
Affairs, General Secretariat
Council of the European Union

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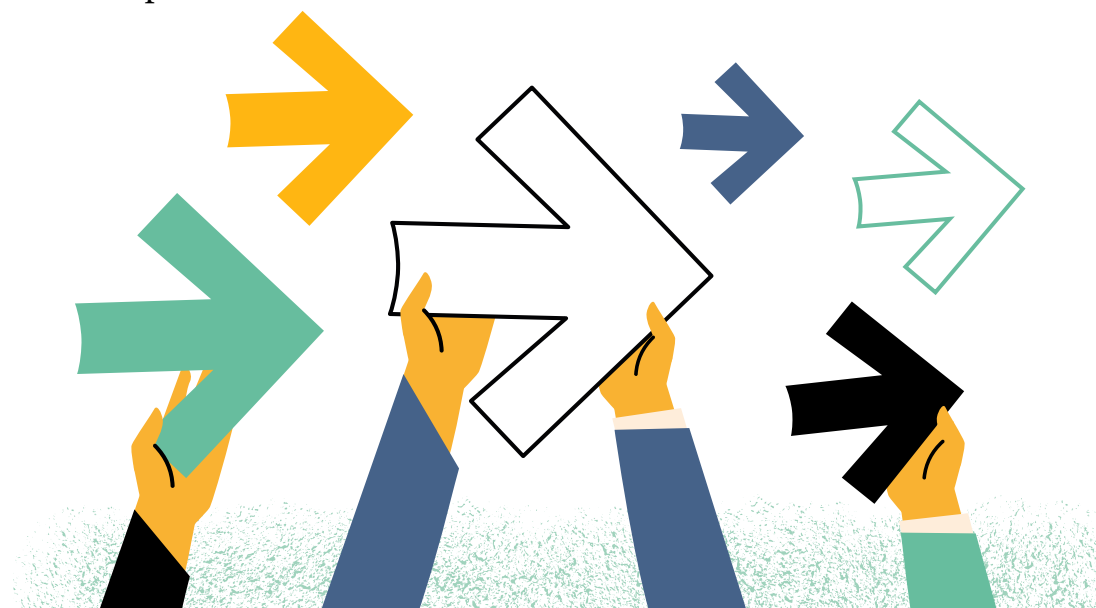
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REFLECTIONS

Six takeaways for re-imagining migration partnerships

The Vienna Migration Conference 2021 featured two days of intensive and wide-ranging discussions exploring challenges, opportunities, and strategies for re-imagining, and ultimately strengthening, migration partnerships. Participants shared many different experiences and perspectives—but also some common points on what should come next.



Authors



Justyna Segeš Frelak
Senior Policy Advisor, ICMPD



Caitlin Katsiaficas
Policy Analyst, ICMPD

With the understanding that migration is a complex and often politically sensitive phenomenon, panellists stressed the need for holistic, yet multiple, solutions to solving current challenges. While partnership is an important governance tool, it is necessary to be realistic as to what migration cooperation can achieve. For partnerships to deliver desired outcomes, building trust is fundamental—both within the European Union and between Europe and partner countries. Focusing first on areas of common interest can pave the way for discussions on more controversial issues. Trust building needs time, and partners often under-invest in or under-estimate the time needed to really listen to and understand each other. Also central, cooperation must take place on an equal footing—an approach that might be characterised by joint leadership and shared responsibility. All parties should put forward credible offers and demands to their partners. It is also critical that the right people are on board, and cooperation should overall encompass multiple levels of government, in addition to migrants and labour market actors.

Given the myriad complexities and considerations, how should migration partnerships be re-imagined? Here are six fresh takeaways stemming from the conference discussions.

Six fresh takeaways ←

1 Migration partnerships are synonymous with foreign policy.

The internal and external dimensions of migration policy are inherently interconnected, yet finding the right expression for this in terms of diplomatic priorities can be complicated. Although Ministries of Interior are usually the authorities entrusted with migration management, their bargaining power is often limited, meaning that foreign policy officials can and should play a greater role in forging partnerships. Panelists underscored that better coordination, and the use of foreign policy, would enable the EU to make more compelling offers to its counterparts. However, while foreign policy actors should empower migration partnerships, they should not be dependent on such cooperation to the exclusion of all else.

2 Don't forget the neighbours of your neighbours.

In supporting partnerships, Europe often focuses on its direct neighbourhood or on countries of origin. But countries in between or beyond—those along the migration routes—are also important to engage. For instance, the southern borders of North African countries are often disregarded when responding to migration flows—despite the fact that most mixed-migration movements in Africa take place within rather than beyond the region. These gaps and realities need to be acknowledged via programming that supports neighbours in working with their neighbours, so that ultimately people do not feel a need to migrate or can do so safely. Taking a whole-of-migration-routes approach follows a similar logic.

3 To engage or not to engage?

Partnerships can be contentious. When potential partners are controversial, like the Taliban, political leaders face a common challenge: Is it better to have no partnership or to enter into a contentious one? Panellists expressed differing opinions, particularly regarding the Taliban. However, there was a consensus that, with respect to Afghanistan, humanitarian aid trumps all—and engagement and dialogue with the Taliban is a precondition for providing humanitarian assistance—but this does not have to mean recognition. The ongoing situation at the EU's border with Belarus also received special attention, where the instrumentalisation of migrants as a foreign policy tool brings the crisis outside the realm of migration management. In this exceptional case, the EU is in a uniquely difficult situation because there is no partnership.

4 Pave the way for public acceptance.

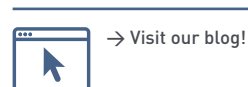
It is not just the partner but the topic in question that can spark controversy. Public opinion can be a roadblock to migration cooperation and must be considered in the design of and narratives about partnership. For Europe's partner countries, expanding legal pathways is key for selling cooperation to their publics, so a narrow focus on controversial issues such as return often leads to deadlock. Focusing the narrative around common interests can create needed political space for entering into and implementing joint initiatives. A common interest is controlled migration, for all partners involved, but there should be an understanding that control does not only mean discouraging irregular migration—it also means providing legal pathways.

5 Be a fair and foul weather friend.

We tend to redirect attention—and funds—if we see no urgency, but partnerships should be seen as a tool in both good and bad times. Migration partnerships should be reliable and long-term, whether in a time of stability or crisis. Instead of jumping from crisis to crisis, panellists stressed that partners should invest in enduring cooperation, maintaining dialogue even if there are no immediate results. Zooming in on the EU's immediate neighbourhood, the case of Belarus underlines that migration is an ever-changing phenomenon and both routes and flows can shift rapidly.

6 Don't reinvent the wheel.

Re-imagined partnerships do not necessarily mean introducing new initiatives—quite the contrary. Implementing the commitments partners have already taken, and using existing migration dialogues (e.g. the Rabat and Khartoum Processes), is a useful way forward. Panellists mentioned the Joint Valletta Action Plan several times as a tool that needed dusting off. In other words, what is needed now is less paper and more action. The appointment of an EU migration partnership coordinator, whose job it would be to bring together stakeholders working on various aspects of migration partnerships and support work towards common objectives, was suggested as one potential way to achieve better coordination and operationalisation.



Consensus, concession and compromise—taking migration partnerships to the next level



As governments seek to address challenges and seize opportunities connected to trans-border mobility, policy debates have identified migration partnerships as integral to achieving progress. The concept has indeed evolved from a mere buzzword to a comprehensive instrument of international migration governance based on widely accepted tenets and numerous concrete tools. The principles are clear: Migration partnerships need to **① build upon mutual trust and joint objectives**, **② guarantee a fair distribution of rights and obligations** and **③ ensure that the costs and benefits are absorbed equally by all parties**. Partnership, moreover, must be practised at all levels of migration governance, entailing joint agenda setting, political and technical cooperation and shared operational delivery.

The refugee crisis of 2015 revealed fundamental weaknesses in the European and international protection and migration management systems. It also confirmed that no state or region can go it alone in addressing migration challenges. The migration partnership principle was, consequently, reinforced through multiple existing formats and frameworks and newly developed instruments. Examples include, among others, the Valletta Process, EU Action Plan, EU-Turkey statement, EU-Afghanistan Joint Way Forward declaration, AU-EU-UN Tripartite Taskforce on the Situation in Libya and the recent Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood. These arrangements stand out in transcending regional borders, integrating economic and development components and broadly expanding the scope of migration cooperation. The shared experiences, importantly, have also fostered greater mutual understanding concerning the priorities and constraints of different partners, nurtured best practices and seen the migration toolbox enlarged with tried and tested tools (and primed it for even more instruments to come).

The migration agreements, in this way, provide the necessary foundation to further enhance partnerships today. That said, the shape that dialogue will take remains unclear. Partners, namely, may elect to pursue consensus-oriented approaches where participants deliberately shift away from their initial positions with the aim of identifying areas that command unanimous support. But they could alternatively seek to promote compromise-based models that steer partners to find middle ground and make concessions to get there, even if that means one party must sacrifice its immediate interests.

The very notion of migration partnership further presupposes a certain shared understanding about the issues that should be prioritized and the “right” way to confront the central questions raised by international migration and global displacement. But this consensus rarely exists in practice—reality is more nuanced.

Author



Martin Hofmann
Principal Advisor, ICMPD

While most governments, for example, can agree that irregular migration needs to be addressed, they may disagree on the optimal way to do so. Migrants deemed irregular by one country are also, notably, the citizens of another (1) whose governments may insist that their rights and well-being be protected and (2) whose remittances contribute substantially to household incomes and economic development back home. There is, moreover, wide agreement among nearly all countries that refugees deserve guaranteed access to international protection, a principle enshrined in numerous national, regional and global legislative acts. But no real consensus governs who should provide protection and what international mechanisms on solidarity and responsibility should look like. And though many countries have committed to strengthening channels for legal and labour migration, some, facing domestic populations sceptical of migration, have hesitated to put this principle into practice.

There are, principally, two ways to bridge this divide. One option would see consensus emphasised and migration partnerships further formalised through their integration into new and binding institutions at the international level. The Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees, prepared under the auspices of the UN and adopted in 2018, could provide a template for this strategy. Experience, however, has revealed that, despite their non-binding nature, numerous governments deemed the instruments too far-reaching and refrained from embracing them. A second path forward, meanwhile, would centre attention towards compromise, pragmatic cooperation and problem solving and the continued deepening of partnerships through a regional and sectoral policy approach. This second option promises more rapid gains but could also mean that states shy away from answering major questions pertaining to displacement, global inequities and international solidarity in a formally binding way.

These different routes could leave much needed progress on global migration governance dependent on either top-down idealism that comes too early or bottom-up compromise that arrives too little and too late. A third way, though, is a “bottom-up plus” approach that would aim to gradually improve the performance of migration partnership initiatives, enhance mutual trust among participating states and garner broader public acceptance for more ambitious forms of cooperation. The “plus” component, for its part, would provide an additional avenue to transition from functional practical cooperation to more enduring and formal structures. Discussions to this effect would be triggered when certain milestones are reached based on thresholds related to the performance, depth and acceptance of partnership initiatives. Good practices and lessons learned from the implementation of talent and skills partnerships, for instance, could be adopted by national and international labour migration regimes. Similar examples can be found in numerous other migration policy areas, ranging from cooperation on sustainable reintegration to joint control operations to the involvement of the private sector in migration and development initiatives.

Expectations, overall, will need to remain realistic—prospects for formalising global migration governance will be constrained by the different experiences, diverging views and domestic policy pressures in various regions. International cooperation on migration, nonetheless, has reached a mature enough point to discuss taking migration partnerships to the next level, recognizing the fact that additional structures might be needed to optimally put this cooperation in place.

Committing to partners, staying flexible on the issues



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Authors



Sarah Schlaeger
Specialist Policy and Liaison
ICMPD



Marissa Weigle
Associate Policy and Liaison Officer
ICMPD

A wealth of stakeholder ideas oriented around bolstering migration partnerships along key routes to Europe were brought to the fore during the Vienna Migration Conference 2021. More effective migration management will require robust frameworks and formats that enhance engagement across borders. But there is more than one perspective on what this means in practice. Migration partnership is a concept that has been used quite liberally to describe different forms of, at times, patchy cooperation. The inability of such partnerships to address migration challenges comprehensively has been a distinct source of frustration. There is a general feeling in the policy-making community, however, that the time has come to transform migration partnerships into more dynamic and reliable instruments. This resolve was reflected in the theme of VMC 2021: **re-imagining migration partnerships.**

The EU itself has experimented with different migration partnerships over the past 20 years in a multitude of ways. The wide array of mechanisms falling under the migration partnership umbrella can contribute to confusion in some circles. ‘Mobility Partnerships’, ‘Talent Partnerships’ and the ‘Partnership Framework on Migration’—they all sound similar, but these and other partnership models differ substantially in their intentions and commitments and the way they formalise cooperation. Not all cooperation instruments with partnership features, meanwhile, have received the “partnership” designation, as can be witnessed in the ‘EU-Turkey Statement and Action Plan’ (also known as ‘The EU-Turkey Deal’).

Despite some ambiguity, common denominators of migration partnerships can be identified, namely formalised cooperation and long-term engagement intentions anchored by political commitments. Stand-alone projects are also invaluable tools for targeted cooperation and exchanges based on shared interests. But unless these initiatives are part of a broader strategy, their ambitions typically do not extend beyond the topics and time horizons agreed at the outset. Key ingredients for longer term engagement, meanwhile, include a joint political declaration, an action plan (or similar arrangement) and dedicated resources all agreed by a manageable number of stakeholders. These various elements provide a framework and channel through which mutual commitments can be discussed. And they can be set up as multi-thematic cooperation agreements (e.g. the ‘EU’s cooperation with Africa on Migration’ and ‘Mobility Partnerships’) or single-issue agreements (e.g. the ‘deal’ with Turkey).

Stopping short of legal commitments, the political willingness of partners to stay engaged is often the linchpin of EU migration partnerships. This is particularly true when much is at stake as, for example, the agreement with Turkey

demonstrates. As emphasised at the conference, however, it would be prudent to move forward with a realistic understanding about what migration partnerships can achieve. The non-binding nature and varied levels of engagement may be inherent weaknesses, but this flexibility can be turned into a strength if partners are able to maintain an open dialogue and adapt their cooperation to changing circumstances and interests. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to negotiating migration partnerships. The starting point must always be context- and partner-specific considering that migration is inextricably linked, as both cause and consequence, to the broader socio-economic climate and policy environment of particular places. Cooperation agreements will and should be as diverse as the actors taking part in them.

While some partnerships would be prudent to initially limit their scope to a single issue, others could find it more advantageous to address migration comprehensively and even incorporate other policy area commitments. And though success will ultimately depend on many factors, it is important that partnerships are able to evolve over time and adapt to the changing needs of respective participants. The aims should also be clearly defined even as governments, and this is where political will comes in, are provided some manoeuvring space to decide the specific actions they wish to take. The suboptimal performance of certain

Additional measures to ensure a more efficient use of the migration toolbox:



1 Pursuing resilient partnerships

Partnership proposals should be as broad-based as possible and include related policy areas (such as security, development and economic affairs) and relevant stakeholders to accommodate a wide range of institutional interests. This diversity can ensure that partnerships are more resilient despite institutional changes. The Swiss migration partnership model’s whole-of-government pillar, which promotes inter-ministerial cooperation and joint activities of diverse ministries, public administrations and public agencies, could be emulated.

2 Investing along migratory routes

Migration routes and patterns increasingly connect and cut across different countries and regions and rarely concern only two countries or even one region. Yet partnerships, at present, are generally tailored to specific countries. The current moment, therefore, demands a shift to whole-of-migration-route approaches inclusive of all countries impacted by migratory movements. The next migration partnerships should, in other words, be attentive to the complexity of current migration flows to facilitate better and more flexible responses. This reorientation would enable cooperation, if any problem were to arise, along segments of migratory routes where no partnership otherwise exists.



3 Committing to common objectives

Realizing the full potential of EU migration partnerships will require that objectives be better coordinated between the European Commission and EU Member States. The close historical links between some EU Member States and partner countries render bilateral migration partnerships often more attractive than any offer the EU can put on the table. And legal migration pathways remain a member state prerogative, preventing any agreements from being truly comprehensive in their implementation and proving to be disadvantageous to the bloc's bargaining power. The EU, for example, lacks the ability to offer concessions on legal flows to balance out border control and readmission concerns in partnership building. Greater stakeholder alignment is now required to ensure that bilateral partnerships reinforce rather than weaken EU migration partnerships as reliable instruments for navigating the EU's external migration dimensions. A Team Europe approach, as underlined by multiple participants at the VMC, can enable the EU's Member States to better align their actions and offer more attractive prospective deals to partner countries. This alignment will require further coordination, underpinning calls for the creation of a new partnership coordinator position tasked with streamlining efforts and narratives in migration partnerships across Member States and the EU bureaucracy. The position could be modelled after the proposed return coordinator in the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

cooperation instruments, like the 'Mobility Partnerships', can be partly attributed to the non-negotiable sets of conditions imposed. The EU rather proved unable or unwilling to offer adequate concessions to third-country partners in these agreements. These lessons underline the impetus for more tailor-made, context- and partner-contingent cooperation if the needs and wishes of partners are to be accommodated, mutual interests fostered and success achieved.

A versatile toolbox can further contribute to the development of resilient partnerships that are more likely to withstand unforeseen challenges narrowly confined to only one sphere of the partnership. A sound migration partnership, in this way, rests on actors being granted access to a comprehensive range of policy and implementation options. The toolbox should, pertinently, enable cooperation in different areas of migration and aid partners in achieving balanced approaches that, for instance, include both return and readmission and viable legal pathways. The implementation facets, similarly, should include multi-level cooperation and holistically integrate political, administrative and technical aspects of migration governance. While improved technical cooperation may not resolve diplomatic deadlocks, it could facilitate continued dialogue.

Migration partnerships need not be reimagined from scratch, though. The necessary experience and foundations for designing more reliable and robust migration partnerships are already in place. Certain **additional measures** should be considered, however, to ensure a more efficient use of the **migration toolbox**.

These recommendations, if followed, would all steer the EU towards making more effective use of existing and new migration policy tools and options. Yet if the bloc forgoes context- and partner-oriented designs, struggles to reach common internal positions and fails to foster inclusive models that garner the support of all parties involved, the EU and its Member States risk ceding some of the promise that partnerships hold for improving migration management.



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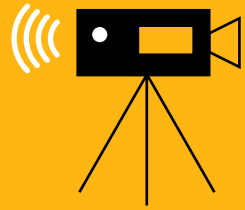


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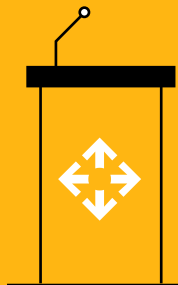
FIGURES

VMC2021 as a hybrid event

9 panels, all
livestreamed



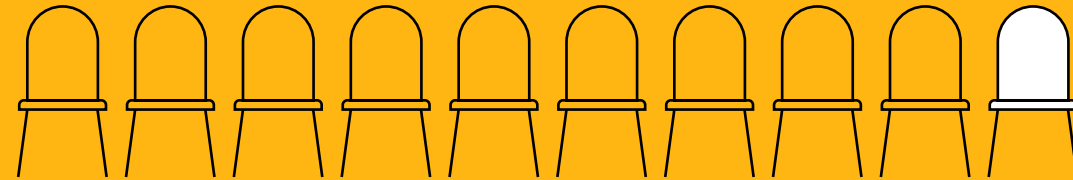
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27
Speakers



395 1-to-1
networking
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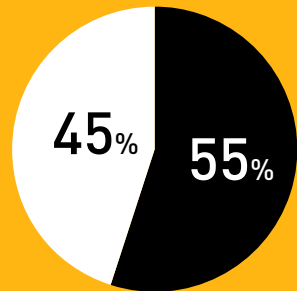
166 In-person participants
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40 countries and
25 organisations and
agencies from different sectors globally

At the venue

Online

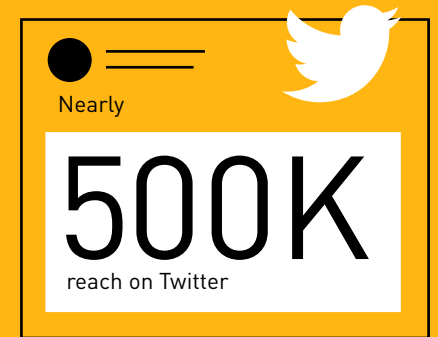
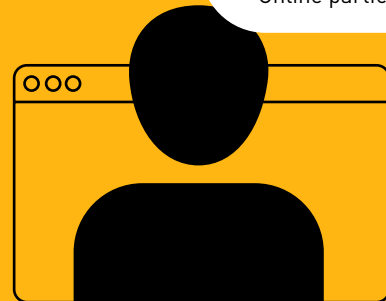
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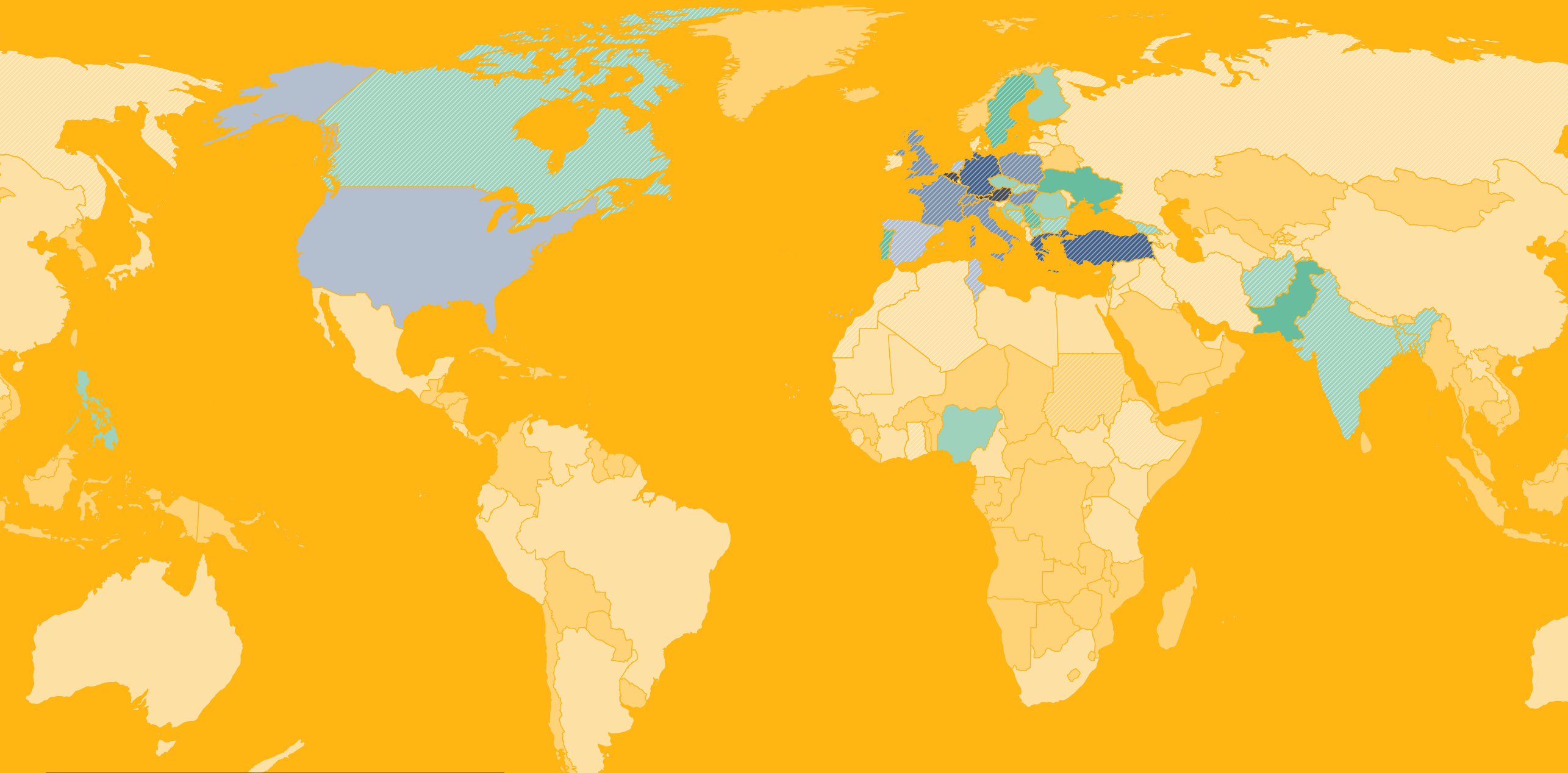
■ In-person
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648 networking
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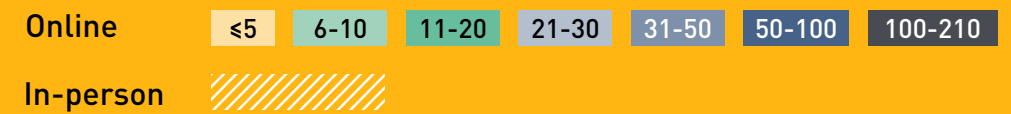




VMC2021 participants sector overview



Geographic locations of VMC2021 participants



**INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR MIGRATION
POLICY DEVELOPMENT (ICMPD)**

Gonzagagasse 1
1010 Vienna
Austria

www.icmpd.org

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Publication team

Katharina Okulski, Camilla Fogli,
Malin Frankenhaeuser, Kathrin Markovsky,
Justyna Segeš Frelak, Caitlin Katsiaficas

Copywriter/copyeditor

Shane Markowitz

Layout

Rosebud Design GmbH

Photos credits

Rudolf Strobl

Production coordination

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Druckerei Hans Jentzsch & Co GmbH
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We build **evidence-driven** migration policy options and governance systems that engage and equip our partners with **effective, forward-leaning** responses to opportunities and pragmatic solutions to complex, regional migration and mobility challenges connected by migration.

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Migration Policy Development

About ICMPD

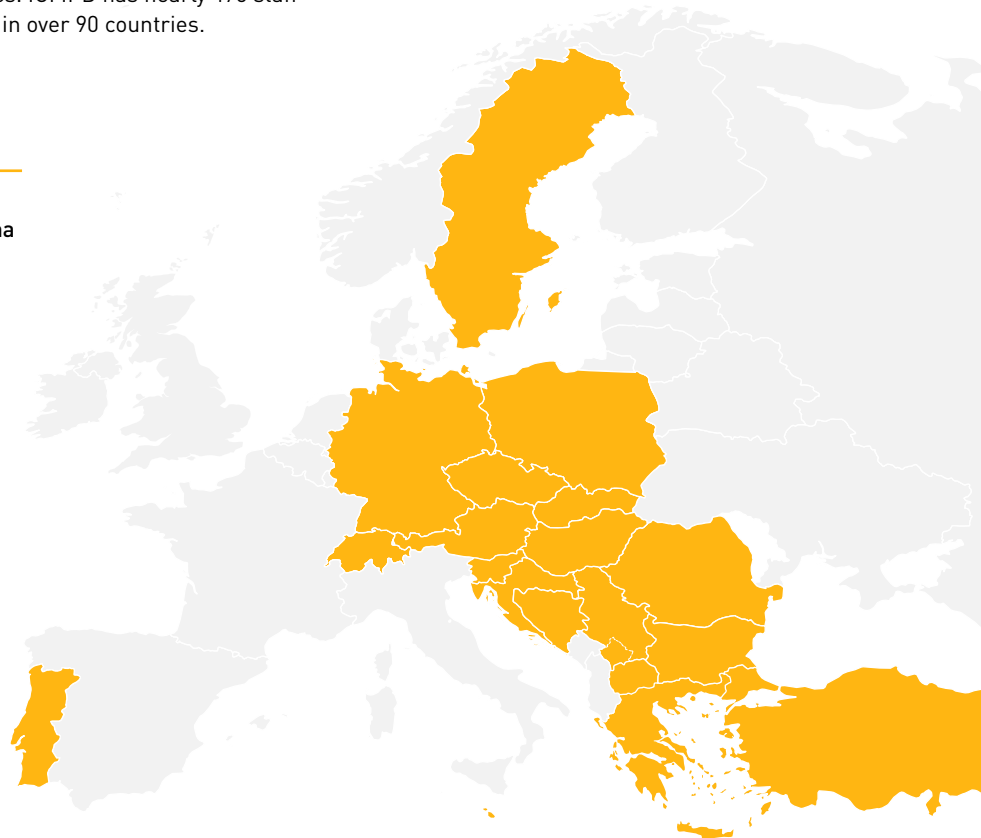
The International Centre for Migration Policy Development is an international intergovernmental organisation purposed with fostering evidence-driven, innovative, and effective solutions to migration challenges.

For nearly 30 years, ICMPD advises and supports its Member States and partners by developing migration policy inputs and innovative practices, while promoting broad, multisectoral cooperation on migration and mobility governance. ICMPD has served as an essential partner to its Member States, associated countries, as well as partners and collaborators in Europe, along migration routes and in key regions connected by migration. ICMPD provides platforms for dialogue and engagement, delivers expertise and evidence, and supports the development of sound, innovative migration policies and governance systems.

Its headquarters is based in Vienna, with a mission in Brussels, regional offices in Malta and Turkey, and local presence in 29 countries. ICMPD has nearly 475 staff members and is active in over 90 countries.

ICMPD Member States

- Austria
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Czech Republic
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Malta
- North Macedonia
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- Serbia
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Turkey



 **19**
Members states

 **475**
Staff members

 **29**
offices

VMC Team

The Vienna Migration Conference is ICMPD's annual flagship event, and its culmination is the sum of efforts from the organisation's best and brightest across teams and locations.

The core organising team, under the leadership of the Policy Unit, is situated within the Directorate for Policy, Research and Strategy. The Brussels Mission and Regional Offices, furthermore, contribute strategic support.



Lukas Gehrke
Director



Malin Frankenhaeuser
Strategic lead



Kathrin Markovsky
Operational lead



Hugo Brady
Strategic advice



Justyna Segeš Frelak
Substance coordination



Caitlin Katsiaticas
Substance and speaker coordination



Camilla Fogli
Engagement and outreach



Marco Ricorda
Engagement and outreach



Katharina Okulski
Organisational management



Marlene Perenda
Registration management and speaker coordination



Laura Rappold
Organisational support



Nikolina Sladojevic
Engagement & organisational support

The Vienna Migration Conference is ICMPD's annual flagship event and a premier platform for high-level discussion on migration in Europe and beyond.

Every autumn the VMC offers an indispensable opportunity to discuss unfolding geopolitical dynamics, global trends and the current EU migration agenda.

Making use of ICMPD's wide-ranging expertise and global network, the VMC convenes politicians, senior officials, experts, and practitioners from governments, international organisations, civil society, academia, the private sector, and the media to debate the most pressing issues of migration governance.

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www.vienna-migration-conference.org



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