

# Global migration: in need of a global response

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**In 2009 the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) launched the first phase of its 'Conversations' process with meetings with several heads of key agencies interested in aspects of migration (IOM, UNHCR, ILO, UNITAR, UNDP). Much of this article is based on these discussions.<sup>1</sup>**

Despite its global nature, national responses to migration continue to take precedence over globally shared ones, although many nations still do not even have a comprehensive domestic programme to deal with migration issues. The exception is the refugee regime which has generated an international system. However this is not well integrated with other forms of migration, and any global response to migration needs to connect with the challenges and particularities presented by forced migration as a sub-category. There are, for example, profound issues of identity and typologies of migrants.

On migration policy we generally persevere with largely national strategies. Numerous initiatives in the past<sup>2</sup> made a convincing case for a more cooperative and collaborative global approach to the management of international migration but, in the end, all have fallen by the wayside. How can countries help one another to find mutually reinforcing international measures with which to more effectively address their respective local migration pressures?

## An international framework

The idea of 'global governance' may sound intimidating to some, and others may fear that this would inevitably lead to the creation of a new, supranational agency. Simply put, however, establishing an international framework for migration policymaking is not principally about governments ceding or losing authority. The reality is that in an era of still accelerating globalisation, employers, smugglers, migrant networks, agents and individual migrants themselves have already taken things into their own hands. Improving and establishing new governance measures is needed to rationalise, improve and supervise these ad hoc initiatives.

And this challenge is not just for some governments, or for the well-to-do nations. Nor can nations any longer be divided strictly into 'sending' and 'receiving' countries.

As an issue, international migration will only gain in political and policy importance. In the view of many, we need an improved institutional framework, complete with normative foundations and coherent regional processes. Such a global governance structure would need to build on existing national, bilateral and regional agreements and processes, which currently provide 'soft' governance in global migration: bilateral, regional, and global dialogues; supranational structures and cooperation (e.g. the EU); multilateral agencies; and international legal frameworks.

A formal permanent international forum – where migration policy would be regularly discussed and where appropriate collective action could be decided on – would help countries establish coherent and comprehensive migration policies at the national level, including better integrating migration issues into countries' foreign and development policies. It should sponsor regular international meetings of ministers responsible for migration where they could engage with their peers on legislation, regulation, practice and experience relating to migration policy. It should also create opportunities for parliamentarians to discuss migration-related issues, in an effort to formulate better strategies for engaging their respective citizens.

An essential step would be articulating and documenting the specific advantages that would benefit countries adopting an international framework to migration policymaking. This in

turn would require a constructive public advocacy campaign to promote the importance of global governance for migration to political leaders, policymakers, the media and the public.

There is also room to improve current processes, such as the Global Migration Group<sup>3</sup> and the Global Forum on Migration and Development<sup>4</sup>, relationships between the leading migration agencies and partnerships with civil society and the private sector. And it is necessary to ensure that the UN High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development planned for 2013 is an interactive, results-oriented dialogue, and not just a series of independent statements.

There is a darker, more dispiriting side to migration. Some people who do migrate find it a disappointing experience. Others use the migration process for untoward purposes, while all too many profit unscrupulously from the desperation that leads so many to wish to migrate or be forced to migrate.

That said, migration remains largely an opportunity – for both migrants and nations. Migrants are dreamers and entrepreneurs. They often risk everything – including their lives – for a different and better future. And in turn, the richness of their ideas, experiences and energies helps to renew, re-energise and rebuild societies. But the subject of migration is also very emotive, causing fears and dangerous perceptions that create anxieties for citizens of all backgrounds, in all lands.

For all these reasons and contradictions, governments need to avoid the pitfalls of a go-it-alone migration strategy and they need to be candid and courageous where realities and pressures demand that they re-think policy. To help nations to maximise the opportunities that migration offers, while better addressing the challenges that

accompany it, political leaders must guide our governments and institutions by providing the international vision and leadership that global migration demands.

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1. *Connecting the Dots* available at <http://www.icmc.net/pubs/connecting-dots> More roundtables and government meetings have since been held in Brussels, New York and Washington, including a session with UN Ambassadors in New York.
2. Willy Brandt Commission in 1980; Commission on Global Governance in 1993; New International Regime for Orderly Movement of People in 1997; Berne Initiative in 2001; Commission on Human Security in 2001; Social Dimension of Globalization in 2004; Global Commission on International Migration in 2005.
3. <http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org>
4. <http://www.gfmd-fmmd.org>