

Report

VMC2023

Europe's leading forum on migration

1

Tailwinds and headwinds
for labour mobility

2

Momentum for the Pact
on Migration and Asylum

3

Protection of migrants,
management of borders





ICMPD
International Centre for
Migration Policy Development

Vienna Migration Conference



 **ICMPD**
International Centre for
Migration Policy Development

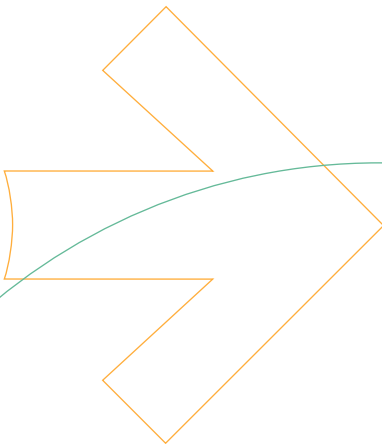


Vienna Migration Conference 2023

Day 1

Tuesday, 10 October 2023

09.30 – 09.50	Conference opening	14.30 – 15.45	Panel discussion A new era for labour migration?
09.50 – 10.00	A short introduction to VMC2023	16.15 – 17.45	Panel discussion Building migration partnerships that deliver
10.00 – 10.30	Keynote address	17.45 – 18.30	In the spotlight East-West perspectives on geopolitical Europe
11.00 – 12.00	High-level panel	18.30 – 20.00	Reception upon invitation of the Mayor and Governor of Vienna Dr Michael Ludwig
12.00 – 12.30	In the spotlight The future of work		
13.15 – 14.00	Side event Mobility and the green transition		



Day 2

Wednesday, 11 October 2023

09.00 – 09.30

In conversation

A Pan-African vision for safe and secure cross-border movements

11.45 – 12.45

Panel discussion

A vision for Europe's migration policy framework

09.30 – 10.30

In conversation

**People on the move:
Protecting lives,
managing borders**

12.45 – 13.30

Conference closing

10.30 – 11.00

In conversation

People on the move: Shared leadership for safe and orderly migration

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 2023 was made possible by the support of

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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.

Welcome

The Vienna Migration Conference 2023 (VMC2023) brought together international leaders, practitioners, and experts at the Palais Niederösterreich on 10-11 October 2023, for two days of discussions on critical current and future issues in migration governance in Europe and beyond.



In the face of global violence, instability and unrest over the past year, the eighth edition of ICMPCD's annual flagship event addressed responses to rising displacement and irregular movements against the need to protect the rights and safety of people on the move. Governments are also under pressure to create legal pathways to attract talent in the face of demographic challenges, severe labour market gaps, and economic disruptions in the fast-changing world of work.

Migration, as a contentious policy area, requires a platform for continuous, structured debate and open dialogue to make progress and find common ground. VMC provides this trusted space every year for frank exchanges – on stage and via a busy schedule of side meetings – on key migration-related opportunities and challenges between countries of origin, transit, and destination on and along the many migration routes to Europe.

Attendees at VMC2023 reaffirmed the value of international cooperation and partnerships in forging a joint agenda, working in the interests of all, and addressing cross-border dynamics together.

Taking stock of new developments in the fields of labour migration and talent and skills partnerships, discussions scrutinised measures between Europe and its partners aimed



at making migration pathways more fit for purpose in the global talent race.

Many speakers were resolute that a robust approach to irregular migration remains a prerequisite to effectively communicating with publics and gaining broader political acceptance of labour migration, with legal and irregular pathways two sides of the same coin.

In this regard, VMC2023 provided an opportunity to assess the implications of the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum (tentatively arrived at in October and agreed upon in December 2023). Speakers noted that the Pact provides sorely needed tools, instruments, and resources to enhance EU-level cooperation on asylum and improve border management.

Conference participants, nonetheless, cautioned that implementation of the Pact will be a resource-intensive, years-long process, underscoring the importance of managing expectations. And though it represents a significant step forward, the Pact will by no means be a comprehensive solution to all migration challenges.

Over the course of two days, VMC2023 featured 14 sessions with 39 distinguished panellists, including a keynote speech by Margaritis Schinas, European Commission Vice-President for Promoting our European Way of Life. With nearly 300 participants at the venue and almost 1,500 virtual attendees, the hybrid format facilitated audience interaction through straw polls and Q&A sessions.

This conference report synthesises the key inputs and insights from these exchanges. Spotlighting the perspectives of the distinguished panellists, session summaries delve into an array of topics discussed at VMC2023, from promoting safe migration for people on the move to building the workforce of tomorrow through migration partnerships. A key takeaways piece and three expert commentaries, meanwhile, offer original takes on key topics addressed by the VMC2023 programme, including the merits and drawbacks of using a carrot and stick approach with migration partners, Europe's prospects for becoming a hotspot for global talent attraction, and nearshoring as a strategy for bolstering economic growth and reducing migration flows from Africa to Europe.



Director General of ICMPPD



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Migration Futures Dinner

Inaugurated in 2021, the Migration Futures Dinner (MFD) convenes high-level stakeholders and decision-makers in an intimate and informal setting on the eve of VMC. MFD aims to foster forward-looking conversations about migration governance, with the goal of identifying key decision points and promoting cooperative solutions.

Against the backdrop of growing polarisation around migration in public debates, the third edition of MFD addressed the topic of how to best preserve a space for fact-based and rational migration policymaking. To that end, the dinner featured an armchair conversation between Financial Times EU correspondent for migration Laura Dubois and Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum Dimitris Kairidis.

Four months into his appointment, Kairidis briefed the room on Greece's evolving approach to migration governance, acknowledging that spiking arrivals are making migration a highly sensitive topic for the public. The Minister commented on the political process leading to the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum, noting that the future of sound migration governance in Europe is staked on the success of this ambitious new tool.

Armchair discussion between Dimitris Kairidis, Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum, and Laura Dubois, EU correspondent for migration, Financial Times



"Migration, if mis-managed, has the potential to destroy the European idea and unity. This is not a theoretical threat. It's something that we have seen in the very recent past."

Dimitris Kairidis



❶ Alexander Wilhelm, Director for International Relations of the German Federal Employment Agency, in conversation with ICMPD Deputy Director General Lukas Gehrke and ICMPD Head of Global Initiatives Oleg Chirita

❷ Serbian Commissioner for Refugees and Migration Nataša Stanisavljević talking to ICMPD Director General Michael Spindelegger

❸ Portuguese Secretary of State for Equality and Migrations Isabel Almeida Rodrigues together with the Chairperson of the Georgian Public Service Development Agency Ketevan Betlemidze



❹ ICMPD Director General Michael Spindelegger talking to Swedish Minister for Migration Maria Malmer Stenergard



Framing the migration debate as pivotal to Europe's future, Kairidis highlighted the Pact negotiations in Brussels as a watershed moment, showcasing the continent's resolve even on the most contentious of issues, and noting that the failure to come to an agreement could drive a wedge through EU unity. He identified the rise of extreme parties and movements across Europe as a significant cause for concern, as their agenda is often bent on exacerbating anxiety around migration and integration for mere electoral calculus.

Against these perilous currents, Kairidis called for the 'political centre' to be a pragmatic voice of reason. In this vein, he lauded the broad-based backing of the Pact throughout Europe's regions and across political stripes, from Giorgia Meloni's right-wing Brothers of Italy party to the left-leaning German Green party and various political forces in between.

The Minister argued that an agreement would allow Europe to make considerable progress in addressing its strained and 'broken' asylum system without compromising its values and principles. With new tools at their disposal, Member States



❺ Irish Deputy Secretary General for Civil Justice Doncha O'Sullivan together with Danish Deputy Permanent Secretary for Immigration and Integration Henrik Ankerstjerne, ICMPD Director a.i. for Migration Dialogues and Cooperation Sedef Dearing, Turkish Deputy-President of the Presidency of Migration Management Hüseyin Kök, Special Envoy of the UNHCR for the Western and Central Mediterranean Situation Vincent Cochetel, and ICMPD Regional Portfolio Manager and Head of Tunis Office Donya Smida

❻ Moldovan State Secretary Jana Costachi in conversation with Austrian Federal Minister for Women, Family, Integration and Media Susanne Raab





could manage their asylum systems more efficiently, fairly, and sustainably, safeguarding human rights for those warranting protection while addressing the concerns of a wary public.

Kairidis emphasised that the Pact's success will hinge not only on a more integrated reception system but also on international cooperation on returns, measures to combat human trafficking, and other efforts to counter irregular crossings. The tensions between the EU and Tunisia over cooperation on undocumented movements serve as a reminder that partnerships are not always easy to forge or sustain. The EU must ensure that its partners feel they are sharing in the benefits of cooperation. The EU must also consistently fulfil its commitments to bolster its credibility as a negotiating partner.

Reflecting on the historical role of migration and international encounters in ancient Greece's flourishing economy and culture, Kairidis concluded on an optimistic note, urging Europe to seize migration as an opportunity and a remedy to economic and social challenges. Rather than an insurmountable problem or source of discord, he said properly managed migration can be a 'solution that benefits us all.'



❶ Italian Ambassador Stefano Beltrame in conversation with the Greek Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Greece Catherine Koika, the Greek Secretary General for Migration Policy Patroklos Georgiadis, and Nina Gregori, Executive Director of the European Union Agency for Asylum

❷ ORS CEO Jürg Rötheli together with Raoul Ueberecken, Digital Transformation Officer, Council of the European Union, Vladimír Šimoňák, Head of the Crisis Management Department at the Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, and Alexandra Wilton Wahren, Director-General for Migration and Asylum at the Swedish Ministry of Justice



10 – 11 October 2023
Palais Niederösterreich
Herrengasse 13
Vienna's historic city centre

The 8th edition of the Vienna Migration Conference took place at Palais Niederösterreich, a historic residence in the heart of Vienna, on 10 – 11 October 2023.





❶ European Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas, Greek Minister Dimitris Kairidis, Austrian Federal Minister Susanne Raab, Swedish Minister Maria Malmer Stenergard, Turkish President of the Presidency of Migration Management Atilla Toros, ICMPD Deputy Director General Lukas Gehrke

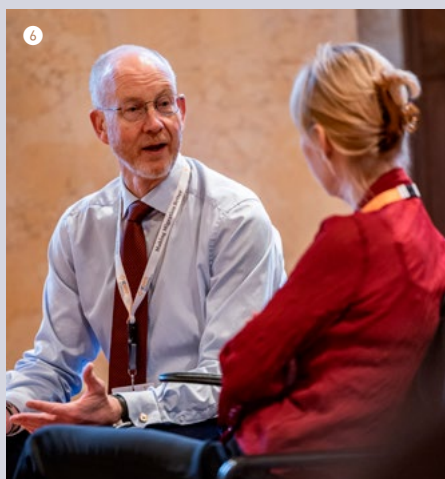
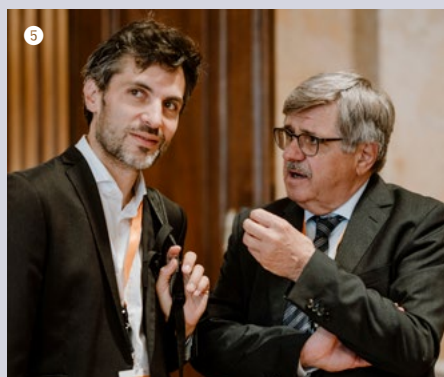
❷ Member of the City Council and Provincial Parliament of Vienna Petr Baxant opening the reception hosted by the City of Vienna on day 1 of VMC2023

❸ ICMPD Director General Michael Spindelegger welcoming participants



❶ Norwegian State Secretary Even Eriksen and Siw Skjold Lexau, Deputy Director General of the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, meeting ICMPD Director, Brussels Mission, Ralph Genetzke

❷ David Kipp, Associate for Global Issues at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs talking to former Director of the Swiss Federal Office for Migration Eduard Gnesa



❸ Ambassador for Migration and Return Jörgen Lindström in dialogue with the Director-General Alexandra Wilton Wahren, both of the Swedish Ministry of Justice

❹ ICMPD Director a.i. for Migration Dialogues and Cooperation Sedef Dearing in conversation with Deputy Director General for Consular Affairs Hannes Schreiber of the Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs





❶ Victoria Rietig, Head of the Migration Program at the German Council on Foreign Affairs in dialogue with Veronica Coulter, Canadian Minister Counsellor for Migration, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

❷ Croatian Ambassador Daniel Glunčić in conversation with Belgian Ambassador and Permanent Representative Caroline Vermeulen

❸ Nils Coleman, Deputy Head of the Directorate General for Migration at the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security together with Acting Deputy Director General of the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service Jan Willem Schaper

❹ Christine Oberauer, Expert at the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior talking to Kenyan Ambassador Mary Mugwanja





5 Grzegorz Borowski, Eurodac Product Owner at eu-LISA, together with Department Director Tomasz Cytrynowicz, and Director General Arkadiusz Szymański, both of the Polish Office for Foreigners

6 Danish Ambassador and Permanent Representative Christian Grønbech-Jensen talking to Danish Ambassador for Migration, Return and Readmission Jens Godtfredsen

7 Bulgarian Chairperson Mariana Tosheva together with Croatian Director of the Office for Human Rights and National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator Alen Tahiri and State Secretary of North Macedonia Magdalena Nestorovska

8 Chairperson of the Georgian Public Service Development Agency Ketevan Betlemidze in conversation with Director Giorgi Tabatadze of the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs



❶ AR Consulting Director Alfred Ruhaltner in conversation with ORS CEO Jürg Rötheli and Serco Europe Managing Director Gaetan Desclée

❷ Nina Gregori, Executive Director of the European Union Agency for Asylum in conversation with Jaana Vuorio, Director of Legal Service at the Finnish Immigration Service

❸ Jeroen Vandekerckhove, Head of International Relations at the Belgian Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers in dialogue with Deputy Director of the Mixed Migration Centre Roberto Forin



❶ Fragomen Senior Knowledge Manager Ana Sofia Walsh together with Fragomen Managing Partner Jo Antoons

❷ German Ambassador Götz Schmidt-Bremme talking to Director General Ulrich Weinbrenner of the German Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community



❸ Michele Amedeo, Deputy Head of the Migration Unit of the European Commission in conversation with ICMPD Head of Region, Mediterranean, Julien Simon

❹ ICMPD Senior Project Manager Enrico Ragaglia in dialogue with Nigerian Ambassador and Permanent Representative Suleiman Dauda Umar



❶ Special Envoy of the UNHCR for the Western and Central Mediterranean Situation Vincent Cochetel in conversation with Vice-Chairman of the Austrian Red Cross Ruth Doyle

❷ Danish Deputy Permanent Secretary for Immigration and Integration Henrik Ankerstjerne together with Director of Migration and Borders Philippa Rouse, Home Office, United Kingdom



VMC venues

- 2016 Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs and Hofburg Palace, Vienna.

- 2017 Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna.

- 2018-2019 Aula of Sciences, Vienna.

- 2020 Online, broadcasted from BrainTrust studios, Vienna.

- 2021-2023 Palais Niederösterreich and online, livestreamed on dedicated virtual platform, Vienna.

1

INTRO- DUCTION




Vienna
Migration
Conference

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Opening remarks

"Our ability to communicate strategically around migration has not seen enough progress. As migration governance stakeholders, we are still struggling to explain what we're doing and why we're doing it to the public, media, our citizens, and voters."

Michael Spindelegger
ICMPD



Addressing a packed house at the Palais Niederösterreich and a global audience of online viewers, ICMPD Director General Michael Spindelegger solemnly opened VMC2023, offering condolences for the victims of the terrorist attack against Israel on 7 October. Recognising the rise of violence, conflict, and instability worldwide, he emphasised the stark implications for human mobility in all its forms. This volatile geopolitical environment, coupled with soaring living costs and natural disasters, has contributed to the highest levels of global displacement since the Second World War and a steep increase in irregular arrivals to Europe, the most since 2016.

As political, economic, and social turmoil uproots people from their homes across a large swath of the planet, Europe continues to grapple with the effects of aging societies, technological transformation, changes in the world of work, and accompanying labour force shortages in key sectors and essential occupations. Against this backdrop, Spindelegger commended the growing embrace of migration cooperation to forge joint approaches and walk new paths to respond to shared challenges and opportunities.

While VMC aims to provide a preeminent platform for discussing the future of migration governance, assessing the past and heeding lessons learned is critically important to this mission. In this regard, as part of a 30th anniversary introspection, ICMPD looked back on international migration cooperation, finding cause for both optimism and concern. Although news coverage and public debates often convey the impression that officials and societies are ill-equipped, inept, and ineffective in managing migration, Spindelegger noted that governments are better prepared to meet current and future challenges than ever before.

Substantial progress has been made in numerous key areas, providing policymakers with a better understanding of the dynamics of migration, greater access to tools and instruments to govern human mobility in beneficial ways, and robust regional and cross-regional partnerships to respond to the multi-faceted aspects of migratory movements. An acknowledgement of this progress, importantly, can foster a sense that the challenges of today and tomorrow can be addressed, too.



The Director General, nonetheless, pointed to the increasingly polarising debates on migration as a risk for sound policy-making that must be met with candour and targeted communication on the part of decision-makers. Governments must become better at communicating the necessity and direction of migration strategies and policies to the media and public. Failure to win over societies, meanwhile, will continue to narrow the policy space needed for comprehensive and forward-looking migration policies.

In its eighth year, VMC provides an important international platform for dialogue on migration across sectors and regions, convening experts, policymakers, the business community, diplomats, academic researchers, and journalists. The various pressing challenges of the current migration environment, Spindelegger concluded, underscore the need for keeping these conversations going and for making migration governance fit for present and future challenges.

Austrian Federal Minister for Women, Family, Integration and Media Susanne Raab opened the conference on behalf of host country and ICMPD founding member Austria. She shared Austria's perspectives on migration governance priorities, and in this context, emphasised ICMPD's role as an essential knowledge hub for migration-related topics and an indispensable organisation for bridging the gap between theory and practice, building effective migration infrastructure, and forging cross-border partnerships.

Concerning Austria's top priorities for the migration policy agenda, Raab pointed out that the country is still occupied with the integration of nearly a hundred thousand beneficiaries of temporary protection who fled Russia's aggression against Ukraine and tens of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers who arrived during a large spike in flows in 2022 via the Western Balkan route. For a small country like Austria, she said the record number of asylum applications in 2022, the most since the Hungarian crisis of 1956, has placed enormous strain on integration services. She cited a lack of language skills and increasing levels of illiteracy among the new cohorts of asylum seekers as just one example of related challenges, particularly with a view toward promoting swift labour market



"Migration and integration are two sides of the same coin: The success of integration also depends on the number of people coming to your country at any point in time and the skills they bring with them."

Susanne Raab
Austrian Federal Minister for Women, Family,
Integration and Media

"Migration management should focus on realistic and long-term solutions. Each country, regardless of its geographical location and ability to benefit from migration movements, must play its part in finding solutions."

Atilla Toros

President of the Turkish Presidency of Migration Management



participation. In 2022, seven in ten participants in German language courses required basic literacy training before they could proceed to language instruction.

As a second priority, the Minister stressed combating human trafficking and better management of migration pathways. In this regard, she praised the October tentative agreement on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum as an important step forward in providing additional support to Greece, Italy, and other first line countries in managing their borders and providing protection to people on the move. She pointed to the drop in arrivals to Austria in 2023 as an indication that migration cooperation can succeed in addressing the movements of undocumented individuals across migratory routes.

In line with Spindelegger's remarks, Raab spotlighted persistent labour shortages across key sectors as a problem holding back European economies. She called for governments to be open to skilled migrants and meeting their integration needs, including putting in place attractive ecosystems that make people want to come and stay in Austria with their families. While she asserted that regular and irregular migration require different responses, she said that enhanced partnerships between Europe, Africa, and Asia can contribute to mutually beneficial cooperation on both types of pathways, addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities for origin and destination countries.

In his opening remarks, Atilla Toros, President of the Presidency of Migration Management at the Turkish Ministry of Interior, representing Türkiye as current Chair of ICMPD's Steering Group, also highlighted the importance of migration management and partnerships in the face of multi-faceted global crises. As a country located on several of the most important migration routes and a host to millions of refugees under various schemes, including 3.2 million Syrians, he said that Türkiye places emphasis on ensuring refugees' access to basic rights including education, healthcare, employment, and other social benefits.

In his role as Chair of ICMPD's Steering Group, Toros noted that the Turkish government has advocated for boosting

investments in tackling the root causes of migration in countries of origin and the safe return of migrants not in need of international protection. Such approaches, importantly, require enhanced cooperation between governments, the private sector, and civil society actors to support durable development and/or conflict resolution in source countries, such as Syria, and mitigate other factors leading to displacement. For instance, Türkiye's National Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration System, in collaboration with ICMPD and supported by Denmark, the Netherlands, and Norway, has sought to implement projects promoting social development in countries of origin.

Effective border management remains another focus area, according to Toros. He said that Türkiye has bolstered its capacities to coordinate border management through a holistic approach, emphasising investments in physical infrastructure and technology to buttress border security and voluntary return activities. Here, too, he sees migration partnerships and a coordinated approach as the linchpin to success in third-country resettlement and voluntary return. Toros remarked that a new international migration cooperation centre in Istanbul, established in collaboration with ICMPD, could be a pivotal step towards institutionalising cooperation across all dimensions of migration.

The curtain now raised on VMC2023, ICMPD's conference hosts introduced the themes and agenda planned over the ensuing two days. As a novel addition to the conference format, Malin Frankenhaeuser, ICMPD Head of Policy and VMC Lead, invited the nearly 300 in-person attendees and almost 1,500 online viewers to share their opinions on top migration priorities in the first of several interactive digital straw polls that accompanied several of the VMC discussion sessions. The results of the initial poll revealed that the VMC audience placed mitigating conflict and political instability as their top issue related to migration governance, followed by tackling social inequality and addressing economic growth and labour shortages. In response to these results, Frankenhaeuser concluded that VMC2023 would provide an opportunity to tour many of these topics, including developments on labour mobility,



“The Vienna Migration Conference always aims to have a finger on the pulse, with a focus on the most pressing issues.”

Malin Frankenhaeuser
ICMPD

"The difficult migration policy reform process is accompanied by heated and sometimes anxious public debates at the EU and national levels. VMC is here to contribute to and facilitate these public debates in a rational and fact-based manner."

Lukas Gehrke
ICMPD



progress on European approaches to migration governance, and frictions arising between different policy objectives when people are on the move.

Lukas Gehrke, ICMPD Deputy Director General and Director for Policy, Research and Strategy, walked the audience through a number of key issues to be put front and centre in the course of the conference. He noted that the integration of displaced Ukrainians in Europe and the provision of sustainable support for hosting communities is becoming more pressing as the conflict drags on without an end in sight. Gehrke reiterated that the resulting strains on reception and integration systems come on top of considerable resources invested in providing support to substantial numbers of asylum seekers and irregular migrants.

The situation in the Mediterranean region has worsened, with death tolls soaring and sustainable solutions still lacking. Increased flows to Europe's southern shores stem, in part, from a more confrontational geopolitical environment, including multiple coups in the Sahel region, furthering political instability and hampering cooperation on migration issues. A rise in extreme weather events and natural disasters, from devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and Morocco to flood events and wildfires, has further compounded the situation near and far. Gehrke added that protracted instability and violence in Afghanistan and Syria continue to feed displacement and irregular migration.

Against this backdrop, Gehrke emphasised that VMC2023 would enable stakeholders to assess Europe's progress on devising sensible, rational, and functioning asylum and migration policies and discuss the impact of the Pact on improving the protection of the lives and rights of persons on the move. The conference, he concluded, would also be a vehicle to address how Europe can better guide the public debate in a fact-based and constructive manner and bring down the temperature on heated discussions that detrimentally impact the ability to reach pragmatic solutions.



②

THE DISCUSSIONS



Keynote address

ON STAGE

Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President for Promoting our European Way of Life, European Commission

Michael Spindelegger, Director General, ICMPD



Setting the stage for VMC2023, Margaritis Schinas, European Commission Vice-President for Promoting our European Way of Life, delivered a buoyant keynote address, nearly a week after the Council of the EU reached a compromise on the Crisis Regulation. This deal marked the crucial final step needed to initiate ‘trilogue’ negotiations between the Council, Commission, and Parliament on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

In his speech, the Vice-President assessed the Pact and other EU measures aimed at crafting a more coherent and comprehensive response, appraised the bloc’s progress in migration diplomacy, and outlined his vision for the future.

Now on the verge of an unprecedented agreement, Schinas argued that Europe was turning the page on a decade of rancorous and polarising debates on migration. Since the 2015-2016 crisis, Member States on the external border have voiced palpable concerns about disproportionate responsibilities regarding reception, while inward countries have grappled with accommodating and integrating unexpected arrivals as they move onward. Facing numerous crises, including ‘Morias’ and ‘Lampedusas’ as well as Belarus’ 2022 instrumentalisation of migration, the Vice-President noted that the EU was often put in the position of playing firefighter, reacting to incidents rather than anticipating them. He emphasised that these crises are more symptom than cause, attributing rising political tensions to the lack of a genuinely common European approach to migration and asylum.

Against this backdrop, Schinas praised the Pact for its multi-dimensional and holistic approach to asylum that aims to balance border protection and Europe’s status as an asylum destination. While migration policy has long been a ‘stumbling block’ threatening the cohesion of the EU, he believes it can now unite Member States behind a common purpose and give them the resolve to act collectively. The Pact, he said,

will help prevent future migration crises, strengthen Frontex, promote solidarity within Team Europe, and facilitate cooperation with origin and transit countries on, for instance, organising returns for individuals not found in need of protection.

Despite persistent cynicism in Brussels, he identified the Pact as the capstone to years of progress on migration governance in Europe. Schinas commended the completion, for example, of five state-of-the-art reception centres on Greek islands following the Moria tragedy, remarking that these facilities will serve as precursors for the better standards of reception that the EU now plans to provide. He also hailed the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Although not seamless, a whole-of-society approach has enabled Ukrainians to broadly gain access to European job markets, education, and healthcare services.

As part of an EU commission that vowed to be more geopolitical, Schinas lauded the EU’s embrace of migration diplomacy as a tool for securing its interests and values. Pronouncing the end of an ‘age of innocence and naivety,’ the Vice-President said migration policy can no longer rely merely on regulatory tools to be effective. He instead urged a Team Europe approach that will give the bloc the ability to better secure partnership agreements to manage the movements of people. He added that what we choose not to do can be just as crucial as what we are willing to do, emphasising both incentives and disincentives as policy tools.

The Vice-President claimed this more assertive approach is already yielding dividends, citing the response to Belarus' hybrid attack weaponising migrants as a testament to the EU's under-utilised negotiating leverage. In reaction to the incident, the EU employed an arsenal of instruments, including transport and market access, to pressure governments and international airlines to halt flights ferrying migrants to Minsk. The whole-of-route approach, tailored to specific migratory routes, has also enabled the EU to prioritise hot spots and align its geopolitical tools to achieve desired results. For the Western Balkan route, the EU leveraged its visa policy to nudge countries on visa alignment and thereby significantly reduce the number of migrants in transit. This route-based approach also contributed to the Memorandum of Understanding signed with Tunisia focused on building a strategic and comprehensive partnership encompassing economic development, investment and trade, the green energy transition, migration, and people-to-people exchange.

As part of a stepped-up geopolitical posture, however, a more diverse toolbox and a clearer definition of smuggling are needed, according to the Vice-President. The EU must embrace an all-of-the-above package, from a revised visa suspension mechanism with a lower activation threshold to

institutionalised rules targeting transport operators facilitating human trafficking. Although such tools have been deployed on an ad hoc basis before, they now need to be implemented comprehensively.

A renewed focus has been placed on West Africa, which has seen a recent uptick in outward migration. Speaking in between work visits to the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Senegal, Mauritania, and Ghana aimed at promoting cooperation on migration, Schinas remarked that West African governments are receptive to cooperation on returns and readmission for citizens refused asylum. The EU is also negotiating with Egypt and seeking to renew and strengthen migration cooperation with Türkiye. These efforts, combined, are directed at forging an international coalition against migrant smuggling and trafficking.

While irregular migration dominates headlines and galvanises societies, Schinas urged the EU to also address legal migratory pathways before it is too late. As the continent confronts acute labour shortages in key sectors, impacting small, medium, and large enterprises, he advocated for harnessing talent mobility. Revisions to the EU Blue Card scheme for high-skilled individuals from third countries, alongside efforts to reform long-term residence and permit directives, are steps in the right direction. He said an EU Talent Pool, coordinated in partnership with European employers, will facilitate third country nationals in applying for job vacancies in critical sectors in participating EU Member States. The Vice-President argued that well-designed legal migratory pathways can address labour market gaps, improve the political and economic stability of partners, and reduce irregular migration. Though contentious, he asserted that these policies would eliminate pull factors and cut out smugglers by providing alternative legal routes.



“The Pact gives us a regulatory framework firmly grounded in EU law. It will not be a patchwork of regulatory arrangements like the one we have had so far.”

Margaritis Schinas



→ Watch the full keynote address



High-level panel

ON STAGE

Dimitris Kairidis, Minister of Migration and Asylum, Greece
Maria Malmer Stenegerd, Minister of Migration, Sweden

MODERATION

Michael Spindelegger, Director General, ICMPD



Europe has faced no shortage of vexing challenges over the past year as the continent continues to grapple with conflicts and violence, climate change, and global economic turmoil. This turbulence, closely linked with increased movements of people within and across borders, has helped keep migration governance at the top of the EU agenda. It has also set the stage for Member States to forge agreement on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, which when implemented will mark the most fundamental overhaul of the EU's border and asylum regime in 30 years.

In this context, the high-level panel assessed the strengths and shortcomings of the EU's migration policy, identified opportunities and challenges for migration governance, and discussed the political prospects for finalising the Pact. The session, moderated by ICMPD Director General Michael Spindelegger, included as panellists Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum Dimitris Kairidis and Swedish Minister of Migration Maria Malmer Stenergard.

While hailing the migration deal as sign of the EU's resolve, the two Ministers cautioned that the Pact was only a stepping stone towards developing a more comprehensive strategy that brings on board

international partners and focuses on asylum procedures, in concert with prioritising dignified returns and root causes. Kairidis indeed warned that the asylum system will be rendered moot as long as countries of origin shun cooperation with EU Member States. Worse – a failure to address the contentious issue of returns, he added, could enable far-right political parties to exploit the topic and upend years of policy progress.

Though a seemingly intractable issue, the panellists suggested a three-pronged strategy for addressing the return of individuals whose asylum claims are rejected. They, firstly, advocated mainstreaming migration policy – and the issue of returns specifically – into various bilateral or multilateral deals with third countries. This approach could see Member States and/or the EU associate development aid with third party cooperation on returns. Incentives, in other words, would ostensibly steer countries of origin to accept greater numbers of their citizens back.

This cooperation, secondly, could be bolstered through the involvement of IOM, UNHCR, and other international partners. Malmer Stenergard underscored that these partners have “ears and eyes on the ground” and can therefore give advice on best practices and good investments to promote better migration cooperation.

“It took us years to achieve the Pact, but it is only a stepping stone. We should not now relax and declare, ‘mission accomplished.’ Migration is a constantly evolving issue presenting new challenges. We need to keep running to avoid falling behind.”

Dimitris Kairidis



Kairidis, meanwhile, added that permanent formats with state partners, such as routine bilateral meetings between Greece and Türkiye, could also help establish constructive working relationships where participants can build common cause and foster trust.

Both speakers, thirdly, stressed that EU cohesion will be necessary to press the bloc's case and lock down international cooperation. Malmer Stenergard said that ministries with adjacent portfolios, such as foreign affairs and migration, must agree on a common stance first and speak with one voice with partners. Kairidis similarly argued that the bloc as a whole is a more capable negotiator able to punch above its weight on the external dimension of migration only when it, too, speaks with one voice. This Team Europe approach, which Greece aspires to be at the forefront of, requires strong but careful leadership at the political level as well as meticulous coordination at the policy level, for example, when it comes to better harmonising development aid, neighbourhood policy, and migration governance.

While irregular migration and porous borders often catch the public spotlight, the two Ministers also reminded the room that implementing legal pathways will be critical to the present and future sustainability of the EU as workforces shrink and populations age. Migration governance, Kairidis said, must also incorporate the labour dimension and a public engagement component aimed at winning over sceptical societies that do not always immediately recognise the direct benefits of migration to their lives, even as migrants contribute to social security and healthcare schemes. Yet, he acknowledged that irregular and legal pathways go hand in hand – it is mission impossible to sway public sentiment if populations do not perceive that borders are effectively managed.

The EU has, nevertheless, struck an important accord among most Member States. Kairidis sounded an optimistic note here, pointing to the disparate range of political parties (from the German Greens to the Italian centre-right) and Member States (representing both southern and northern Europe) supporting the Pact.



→ Watch the full panel discussion!



“We have a new whole-of-government approach to migration partnerships in Sweden. It is important that the Minister for Migration and the Minister for Aid convey the same message when speaking with other countries... the EU bodies must work this way too.”

Maria Malmer Stenergard



Voices of VMC2023

“VMC uniquely brings together policymakers, think tanks, and the private sector from all over the world. The critical value these stakeholders bring to the table is forward-looking responses to key migration governance questions.”

Janina Kugel
Non-Executive Board Member and Senior Advisor, Kyndryl Inc, TUI AG and Boston Consulting Group



In the spotlight

The future of work

ON STAGE

Janina Kugel, Non-Executive Board Member and Senior Advisor at Kyndryl Inc, TUI AG and Boston Consulting Group
Lukas Gehrke, Deputy Director General and Director, Policy, Research and Strategy, ICMPD

The labour market is undergoing transformation at unprecedented speed. Artificial intelligence and other technological innovations, alongside the green transition and geopolitical competition, are all shaping the future of work as the world adapts to a post-pandemic setting. Meanwhile, demographic challenges and severe labour market gaps are placing pressure on European governments to facilitate legal pathways to attract talent.

The spotlight session, against this backdrop, explored the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead and discussed how the choices made by policymakers and company executives today will play a pivotal role in shaping the global workforce of tomorrow. The session put Janina Kugel, Non-Executive Board Member and Senior Advisor at Kyndryl Inc, TUI AG, and Boston Consulting Group, in conversation with Lukas Gehrke, ICMPD Deputy Director General and Director for Policy, Research, and Strategy. Kugel is also the former Chief Human Resource Officer at Siemens, an expert on the future of work, and an author who has been named one of the most 100 influential women in German business.

At the outset, Gehrke and Kugel walked the room through the grim statistics and complex and fraught landscape facing the labour market. More than 75 per cent of employers now report workforce shortages, according to the findings of the ManpowerGroup's 2023 Global Talent Shortage survey cited by Gehrke. Meanwhile, Kugel added that the 30 largest industries in the world alone are struggling to fill 30 million vacancies at an annual cost of \$1 trillion to the global economy. And these shortages will worsen over the coming years as more countries experience the repercussions of their aging populations and a deficit of working age residents. The implications are stark: Without a sufficient workforce, there will be increased financial strain on economies, healthcare,

and pensions and a rising burden that falls on a shrinking number of taxpayers.

In this context, Gehrke and Kugel advocated for talent partnerships as an important ingredient to addressing worker shortages in more affluent countries but cautioned that supplementary policies will be needed to bolster these schemes. Though talent partnerships in industries such as in the field of nursing or IT services, for example, appear promising, they offer only a modest solution to addressing Europe's severe labour shortfalls. Needs, for one, differ between countries. Skills matching programmes and talent partnerships, Kugel emphasised, require years of long-term planning and commitments by companies to hire workers and buy-in from governments to facilitate integration, education, and access to work permits. Businesses, it was noted, often lack the skills, know-how, and resources to engage in efforts aimed at attracting workers globally. Therefore, apart from sectors with the most pressing shortages, enterprises generally do not prioritise strategic workforce planning with foreign talent in mind and could be caught off guard by an impending labour dearth as the baby boomer generation retires.

Governments, Gehrke contended, can provide a considerable boost to businesses on these matters, especially the less internationalised ones, if they proactively focus on creating conducive environments for talent



“Even though we know we need taxpayers and workers, there is a mismatch and maybe not enough political courage to speak up about the risks to society from too little immigration. While it might not help with winning the next election, we have reached a point where it is necessary to talk about the issue.”

Janina Kugel



Voices of VMC2023

“VMC is the place where I come probing ideas that I am developing about existing and future migration-related challenges and where I can test these ideas with other experts I would not be able to meet anywhere else in one single place. Important conversations do not only take place on panels, but also in private conversations over a cup of coffee. This is really what you can take back home.”

Jean-Louis De Brouwer
Director European Affairs Programme,
Egmont Institute

mobility. On this point, Kugel singled out an urgent need for authorities to relax rigid and stringent visa and work permit regulations to accelerate labour mobility. Even if there is interest from foreign workers and domestic employers, talent partnerships can only work if essential requirements can be facilitated such as the timely issuance of work permits. Likewise, as these schemes are scaled up and grow in complexity, she warned they will falter if training and upskilling programmes are not meticulously coordinated between relevant ministries, academic institutions, and employers. The public sector can play a role here by introducing measures that ensure the sustainability of the programmes, such as conducting the long-term strategic planning necessary to prepare the labour market for steering talent into job openings even after the initial excitement of the programmes wears off.

Better communication between decision-makers, policymakers, and their publics, it was emphasised, must also be part of the package. It is far past time for governments to make a more concerted effort to explain the repercussions of Europe’s ageing population and overly stringent migration frameworks on public finances, social welfare, and retirement. Gaining public buy-in for opening labour mobility pathways will never be a straightforward matter, but the stakes for retirees and working age residents are too high for officials to take the easy political route. Relatedly, beyond boosting technical skills, governments need to invest more in the cultural orientation and language skills of migrants at an early stage to ease their integration down the road, so that well-meaning efforts towards sustainable workforce attraction can unfold their full potential.



→ Watch the full panel discussion!



Side event

Mobility and the green transition

ON STAGE

Raffaella Greco Tonegutti, Head of Unit, Human Mobility, Enabel - Belgian Development Agency

Diederik de Boer, Associate Professor of Sustainable Business Development and Director of the Expert Centre on Emerging Economies, Maastricht School of Management, University of Maastricht

MODERATION

Oleg Chirita, Head of Programme, Global Initiatives, ICMPD



Climate change has become a significant driver of displacement and migration in recent years, compelling people to flee extreme weather events and cope with long-term environmental changes. While addressing these movements has moved up the policy agenda, greater attention also needs to be placed on how societies can leverage human mobility to mitigate and adapt to climate change in the first place.

Against this backdrop, the side event at VMC2023 explored how the opportunity dimension of the mobility-climate change nexus provides a means to address widespread labour shortages and combat global warming by tapping into the green transition.

Throughout the session, speakers appraised the current state of play of the green economy and labour market needs and discussed how major policy initiatives such as the European Green Deal, the EU's Skills Agenda, the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, as well as policies established by partner countries, can contribute to advancing a new paradigm that also sees the climate crisis as an opportunity. The panel included contributions from Raffaella Greco Tonegutti, Head of Unit of Human Mobility at Enabel, the Belgian Development Agency, and Diederik de Boer, Associate Professor of Sustainable Business Development and Director of the Expert Centre on Emerging Economies at the University of Maastricht's Maastricht School of Management (MSM). The session was moderated by Oleg Chirita, ICMPD Head of Global Initiatives.

The panellists advocated for the EU to elevate circular mobility on the agenda, arguing that these mutually beneficial arrangements can drive the sustainability agenda forward. Countries facing labour shortages can gain much-needed skills and workers, while source countries will receive

better trained, capable, and experienced workforces familiar with climate-smart and resilience strategies as participants return home. De Boer cited the Migration Partnership Facility-funded project MOBILISE, run by MSM in the horticulture sector, a cutting-edge industry in the Netherlands facing a worker shortfall, as a promising initiative. As part of the project, vocational training centres in Tunisia, Egypt, and Ethiopia will send their university students to the Netherlands for three-month stays, where they will receive further education and gain on-the-job experience in the country's advanced greenhouses.

Though a seemingly unequivocal win-win, such circular migration schemes come with drawbacks. Unfortunately, most EU countries have only entered a pilot phase with such schemes, trialling small-scale projects in niche sectors. To have a meaningful impact, circular migration must be scaled up. However, efforts to expand the programme will undoubtedly encounter challenges. As the number and duration of programmes increases, the panellists said that host countries should adopt whole-of-government approaches to streamline bureaucratic processes and ensure effective matching between participants, universities, and employers. The efficiency of these arrangements will depend on the ability of disparate ministries, such as foreign affairs, labour, interior, and commerce, to collaborate with one common purpose.



Developing adequate infrastructure to ensure that talent or skills partnerships work smoothly in host countries is not a straightforward matter, and the same applies in source countries. Without innovation and labour market ecosystems in place, participants in EU Talent Partnerships, for instance, will be unable to obtain jobs and contribute their new expertise and skills upon returning home. Here it is important to remember that circular mobility is just as much about the circulation of ideas, technologies, and investments as it is about people. Greco Tonegutti stressed the need for renewed attention to matching innovators, entrepreneurs, diaspora, and job creators in source countries with investors and lenders mostly based abroad. Europe can facilitate networking opportunities between these different actors in the ecosystem. This cooperation should also extend to capital infusion and technology sharing. Entrepreneurs in the Global South need to connect with institutions and individuals who can contribute to transforming their ideas into reality, as demonstrated by the PEM-WECCO initiative between Belgium and Senegal. This support, added de Boer, could further strengthen circular migration schemes by enabling trainees to return home with the skills and resources necessary to start their own businesses and bolster their economies.

While circular migration is often associated with the movement of workers from

lower-income countries to Europe (and back), it is important not to overlook the fact that most migration occurs within regions. Europe should, consequently, invest resources in building and strengthening regional circular economies, particularly across the African continent. Greco Tonegutti pointed to Morocco as a country that has developed successful South-South cooperation. Prospective engineers from Western African countries, among others, complete their education in Morocco and contribute to Rabat's economy, while also enjoying a platform where they can test innovative ideas that can be later scaled up or implemented in their home countries. As Europe is already investing in projects connected to the ecological transition and renewable energy in Morocco, it would be prudent to tie together different initiatives on circular migration, development, and the environment.



“Talent Partnerships are an excellent tool that the EU should explore more in the future. As the stays are not permanent, they provide a politically feasible path to getting more skilled labour working in the green economy in Europe. Such partnerships can also contribute to building capacities needed in foreign countries.”

Diederik de Boer



“Investing in skills means investing in systems – to leverage skills, we need to have systems in place that respond to the needs of the labour market.”

Raffaella Greco Tonegutti

Circular migration and labour mobility schemes more broadly, finally, must heed the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are responsible for around 70-80 per cent of jobs globally. While large businesses are equipped with human resource departments, Greco Tonegutti pointed out that SMEs often lack the expertise necessary to compete in the global race for talent. They face challenges in scouting, recruiting, and retaining workers, putting them at a strategic disadvantage. Similarly, SMEs struggle to find the necessary resources to finance the transition to the green economy and relevant reskilling, despite their critical role as experimental laboratories and partners. These gaps hinder Europe and partner countries from fully leveraging opportunities in the green economy and labour mobility generally. The EU and its Member States, consequently, can and should step in by connecting SMEs with labour mobility programmes.

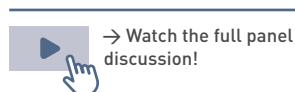
Ongoing trends in Europe and across the globe underscore the need to foster sustainable growth, develop workforces, and provide more legal mobility pathways. The global talent race and efforts to mitigate and build resilience to climate change, in fact, are one and the same. The climate crisis requires developing dynamic, connected economies and labour markets that can fully harness the talents and skills of people. At the same time, the considerable investments that countries are making into the ecological transition can open opportunities to address worker shortages and bolster economies if we embrace whole-of-government and -society approaches necessary to achieving progress.



Voices of VMC2023

“VMC is a testament to the value of meeting people face-to-face to address relevant questions about migration governance that affect all of our countries and citizens.”

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





Panel discussion

A new era for labour migration?

ON STAGE

Alexander Wilhelm, Director for International Relations, Federal Employment Agency, Germany

Patrick Philipp, Director, Certification and Standards, International Road Transport Union

Hendrik Bourgeois, Vice President, Government Affairs Europe, Intel Corporation

Jo Antoons, Managing Partner, Fragomen

MODERATION

Jennifer Tangney, Senior Project Manager, Migration Partnership Facility, ICMPD

Acute labour shortages in both traditional and non-traditional migrant destination countries are putting increased pressure on governments to review the way they manage labour migration, design international partnerships, and attract global talent. In this panel, a diverse group of government, international, and private sector representatives shared their insights and experiences on labour mobility amid changes in policy, practice, and public opinion.

Moderator Jennifer Tangney, ICPD Senior Project Manager of the EU-funded Migration Partnership Facility (MPF), was joined on stage by Alexander Wilhelm, Director for International Relations of the German Federal Employment Agency; Patrick Philipp, Director of Certification and Standards at the International Road Transport Union; Hendrik Bourgeois, Vice President of Government Affairs Europe at Intel Corporation; and Jo Antoons, Managing Partner at Fragomen.

As a testament to the value of migration partnerships between the public and the private sector, the session commenced with a video that spotlighted the success of Lithuania's Digital Explorers programme. Despite Vilnius's focus on establishing itself as a technology hub, its companies have, at times, struggled to attract necessary talent in a global race headed by the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. However, the Digital Explorers project, spearheaded by the Lithuanian government with support from the MPF, has turned this story around by targeting the ICT talent and skills base that Nigeria

provides. All told, 13 Lithuanian companies and 30 Nigerian ICT specialists joined the programme, with 18 prolonging their stays and the rest contributing their enhanced skills to the local labour market back in their home country. This highlights the win-win potential of similar schemes if replicated at scale. Putting an exclamation mark on this success and the importance of institutional growth, the programme has now expanded to include 150 participants encompassing Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia on the receiving side and Nigeria, Kenya, and Armenia as source countries.

While the four panellists commended schemes such as Germany's Triple Win initiative, Digital Explorers, and the revised EU Blue Card Directive intended to facilitate the movement of foreign workers between jobs in different EU countries, they repeatedly underscored that Europe is still trailing its competitors in the global race for talent. There is an urgent need, they emphasised, to expand Talent Partnerships and introduce a raft of measures to facilitate labour mobility. Bourgeois stressed that the economic and geo-political fortunes of the EU will be closely tied to ensuring reliable inflows of talent from abroad. While substantial government subsidies to industries like semiconductors are necessary to promote job growth, he said they are not sufficient. If the bloc wishes companies to bring cutting-edge technology manufacturing to the EU, including factories

“When you look at businesses, they face a lot of complexity because of variations in national immigration rules. This is not only the case for low-skilled workers, but even for highly qualified workers.”

Jo Antoons



for building semiconductors and related components, then businesses need to be assured that they will have the necessary talent to take up work.

This sentiment was echoed by Philipp, who stressed that the transport and logistics industry has been particularly hard hit by workforce shortages throughout the pandemic era, contributing to global supply chain woes, empty supermarket shelves, restricted public transportation options, and obstinate inflation. The headwinds are only expected to intensify, with Philipp saying the present shortage of 2.6 million commercial drivers is projected to swell to 6 million by 2028, even as demand grows. Tangney added that one-third of drivers are likely to retire within the next three years, as the ageing industry struggles to attract young talent. While this sectoral labour deficit would benefit from multi-pronged solutions, including efforts to attract more women and young people into this line of work, labour mobility can and should play a part, too. The International Road Transport Union, to this end, passed a global resolution at its 2023 general assembly advocating for governments to create new opportunities for legal migratory pathways to address a dramatic shortage of drivers.

Though there are numerous stand-alone success stories, like Digital Explorers, that underline the promise of talent and labour mobility more generally, enormous barriers

“Challenge number one really is digitisation – I don’t see enough digitisation. I see still a lot of applications that are handwritten. Sometimes it needs to be in blue ink or not in black ink. These types of requirements belong in the 20th century or the 19th century.”

Hendrik Bourgeois



Voices of VMC2023

“It meant a lot to me to be on a panel signifying that there is hope for Africa. The conference’s achievements show us what migration planning can do. Nigeria would like to replicate VMC’s success in the African context. Africa needs its own ‘meeting of minds’ on migration.”

Akinremi Alade Bolaji
Ambassador, Director for Economy,
Trade and Investment, Ministry of
Foreign Affairs, Nigeria



“EU initiatives to promote labour mobility convey the message to people outside the EU that we need skilled workers in EU Member States and that we are open to it. It provides a marketing effect.”

Alexander Wilhelm

are hampering efforts to scale these up across Europe. The legal framework, for one, is not always fit for purpose – and even when it is, it still fails to provide the efficiency, reliability, and certainty that businesses depend on. According to Antoons, the typical European enterprise rather must confront an array of bureaucratic hurdles, such as onerous degree requirements and salary thresholds, to hire workers from abroad.

This red tape too often applies even in critical sectors, such as IT services and healthcare, that have seen some visa liberalisation in recent years, let alone in less skilled sectors where even more complex hurdles of skills recognition and alignment are often insurmountable. Bourgeois said that semiconductor companies, for example, still face roadblocks every step of the way, starting with tedious paperwork demands at local embassies and consulates

requiring the notarisation and authentication of documents. The process, he added, further typically includes checks by labour offices verifying that immigrants are not taking jobs that could be done by domestic candidates through labour market tests, compounded further by burdensome police and government registration processes.

Migration labour frameworks that rest on the obsolete idea of residence and physical migration for employment purposes are also a growing impediment to labour mobility. Inconsistent rules across EU Member States on digital nomadism, social security, and remote work are, for example, hindering businesses from effectively using non-standard employment arrangements for migrant labour. The patchwork approach to integrating displaced individuals from Ukraine under the Temporary Protection Directive, Antoons said, is emblematic of these obstacles.

The panellists uniformly advocated in favour of more streamlining of procedures. Germany, notably, has approved reforms – to take effect in 2024 – that will position the country to better compete for skilled workers. Against the backdrop of



these reforms, Wilhelm said the Federal Employment Agency is tasking itself with three key competences: (1) a gatekeeper role to ensure fair labour conditions and comparable standards for foreign workers and residents already in the country; (2) a facilitator role to support talent recruitment through the development of international job portals and digital information platforms for both recruiters and job seekers; and (3) a trailblazer role to set up partnerships with both the public and private sector to, for example, train and recruit workers in certain critical sectors including

“The political will and the political support on legal migration is one of the challenges. It is a reality that we are witnessing.”

Patrick Philipp

healthcare and IT services. While applauding these types of manoeuvres, especially a greater emphasis on digitalisation and allocation of resources to shorten waiting times for work permits, Bourgeois and Antoons warned that governments and societies also need to ensure that cities get the quality-of-life component right if they are to attract talented workers that enjoy a wide range of job options throughout the world. Wilhelm, meanwhile, emphasised that investments in diversifying the languages spoken in government offices, especially in rural communities, and assistance to small and medium-sized enterprises on integration matters could also support these businesses in better harnessing the benefits of labour mobility.

All speakers agreed on the need for reforms to promote greater labour mobility including on cost, coherency, and safety. Wilhelm pointed out that, while international recruitment assistance should arguably never come free of charge, governments can serve as a vital partner to business in facilitating the process. Philipp stressed that safety and professionalism, meanwhile, must never be sacrificed. They rather must always be put at the forefront of commercial road transport and public transportation to gain public buy-in, thereby requiring that migrants come equipped with adequate skills to qualify for industry jobs. Despite the fact that the EU’s smorgasbord of national rules is not ideal, finally, Antoons cautioned that the alternative – a harmonised approach to migration – could be worse if it were to see the entire EU revert to the lowest common denominator approach among its Member States on labour mobility. Wilhelm, meanwhile, celebrated competition between Member States to attract talent as contributing to needed innovation that will benefit the entire bloc as long as fair working conditions are safeguarded.



→ Watch the full panel discussion!





Panel discussion

Building migration partnerships that deliver

ON STAGE

Hüseyin Kök, Deputy President of the Presidency of Migration Management, Ministry of Interior, Türkiye
Akinremi Alade Bolaji, Ambassador, Director for Economy, Trade and Investment, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nigeria
Anne Dussart, Department Asylum and Migration - Social Programs, Caritas International Belgium

MODERATION

Sedef Dearing, Director a.i. for Migration Dialogues and Cooperation, ICMPD

Two years after migration partnerships were elevated to the primary theme of VMC, this session revisited how partnerships are now being put into practice at different levels and across all areas of migration governance. Panellists from civil society and government in source, transit, and destination countries shared their experiences and views on good practices, engaging in a discussion about which international cooperation frameworks are needed to maximise opportunities and minimise challenges confronting migrants, returnees, and the societies they live in.

Speakers included Hüseyin Kök, Deputy President of Migration Management at the Turkish Ministry of Interior; Akinremi Alade Bolaji, Ambassador, Director for Economy, Trade and Investment at the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and Anne Dussart, Anne Dussart, Head of the Department Asylum and Migration - Social Programs at Caritas International Belgium. The session was moderated by Sedef Dearing, ICMPD Director a.i. for Migration Dialogues and Cooperation.

Migration is a policy issue that cannot be confined to national borders. From addressing root causes to forging progress on contentious issues such as returns and reintegration, international cooperation is a prerequisite for effective migration governance. For this reason, Kök explained that Türkiye, as 2023 Chair of the Steering Group of ICMPD, has prioritised bilateral and regional dialogue aimed at promoting opportunity and enhancing security in countries of origin. Apart from stemming or responding to irregular flows, partnerships can also provide an opportunity for countries to make migration work for their interests. Bolaji, for instance, pointed out that talent cooperation between Africa and Europe can productively leverage Africa's youth bulge so that it becomes a dividend rather than a burden and creates mutual benefits for both continents.

Partnerships, by definition, can never be a one-way street. Bolaji, to this end, called for Europe to do more to incorporate African solutions into bilateral and multilateral arrangements and ensure that countries like Nigeria share in the benefits of labour mobility. As healthcare professionals from Nigeria fill labour market gaps across Europe, for example, Bolaji said it is incumbent on Lagos's partners to commit to developing medical facilities and training programmes in the country. Dussart, for her part, lamented that civil society is often only integrated into projects as an afterthought or as actors of last resort. She further observed that NGOs have been increasingly forced to devote more time and resources to securing tenders that turn them merely into service providers tasked with implementing government-funded projects. This tendering approach has come at the expense of quality and innovation.

“To improve migration partnerships, civil society needs to be part of the discussion, not only as a service provider but as a fully embedded professional partner tasked with enhancing not the quantity but rather the quality of work.”

Anne Dussart

Collaborations between different state and non-state actors, meanwhile, are necessary and often complement each other, according to Dussart. By including stakeholders from countries of origin and donor countries in project development and implementation, projects benefit from diverse input and greater efficiency in the delegation of tasks. As independent front-line actors who are closely familiar with and generally trusted by migrants, Dussart said civil society groups, for their part, can fill multiple niche roles. Such organisations are far more likely than government officials, for example, to elicit cooperation from target communities wary about working with formal authorities. She noted that civil society can also assist in addressing humanitarian needs such as providing guardians to supervise unaccompanied minors in transit.

All speakers stressed that the deal-making process is only the beginning of a partnership and there must be follow-through. While lauding a series of migration agreements that Nigeria has signed with partners, including the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and the EU, and reiterating Lagos's support for the Global Compact on Migration, Bolaji emphasised that these deals must now be implemented to ensure that countries reap the benefits of cooperation. Institutionalising cooperation can be one

“Migration cannot be treated in isolation from other policy issues and global developments. We have to look at it holistically and ensure that all parties are at the table for discussions.”

Akinremi Alade Bolaji



way to both promote sustained partnerships and steer actors towards achieving short, medium, and long-term goals. Bolaji proposed, for instance, adopting the VMC model as the template for a potential African Migration Conference aimed at facilitating exchanges, fostering dialogue, and sharing best practices across the continent. Kök, meanwhile, surmised that mutual political visits between Turkish officials and partners have helped cultivate constructive working relationships and enhanced operational cooperation on migration. He pointed to a voluntary return mechanism, which relies on the bilateral support of national governments and civil society groups like the Turkish Red Crescent, as a testament to the success of the model. The next step, he says, will be to establish a centre for migration cooperation in Istanbul to further institutionalise relationships across the public and private sectors, academic institutions, and civil society as well as across borders, with an emphasis on Eastern Mediterranean migration routes.

“Mutual visits on migration priorities help us to get to know each other, both at a strategic and operational level.”

Hüseyin Kök



Voices of VMC2023

“VMC reflects Europe’s awareness about migration dilemmas and illustrates the mutual understanding between European partners. It sounds an optimistic tone on an issue we all share a common stake in.”

Patroklos Georgiadis
Secretary General of Migration Policy,
Ministry of Migration and Asylum,
Greece



→ Watch the full panel discussion!





In the spotlight

East-West perspectives on geopolitical Europe

ON STAGE

Jana Kobzová, Foreign Policy Advisor to the President of the Slovak Republic
Luuk van Middelaar, Founder and Director, Brussels Institute for Geopolitics

MODERATION

Hugo Brady, Senior Strategic Advisor, ICMPD

Four years after European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen declared her ambitions for crafting a more ‘geopolitical Europe’, the EU finds itself reacting to a constantly changing international backdrop. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has, for most countries at least, helped harmonise European perceptions of collective defence, external threats, economic self-interest, and humanitarian obligations. And yet, on certain issues, internal divisions remain sharp: enlargement, the rule of law, climate change, transatlantic ties, and migration.

Enter VMC’s annual geopolitical panel, which every year provides a platform to step back from migration challenges and scrutinise the broader geopolitical picture shaping policy developments. Prior instalments have homed in on topics such as the bloc’s pandemic performance, the EU’s grand geopolitical strategy, and the instrumentalisation of migration as a geopolitical weapon. This year, in a session that was heavy on the enlargement debate in a context where accession for Ukraine looms large, moderator Hugo Brady, ICMPD Senior Strategic Advisor, tasked two veteran EU observers with assessing whether Europe can still stand united as a geopolitical player in a global system that is characterised more and more by great power rivalry and competition. Brady was joined on stage by guests Jana Kobzová, the Slovak President’s Foreign Policy Advisor, and Luuk van Middelaar, Founder and Director of the Brussels Institute for Geopolitics.

The EU is now grappling with the prospect of expanding to as many as 36 members, which would boost the Union’s population by 70 million. Numerous constructive steps have indeed been taken over the past year in this direction, with French President Macron dropping his objections to enlargement and von der Leyen using lofty language to describe an EU that will span from Lisbon to Luhansk. Underscoring the stakes, van

Middelaar said providing Ukraine with a pathway to EU membership is about giving Kyiv a place in a newly emerging continental order and out of the ‘buffer zone’ or in-between space that delineated and confined its status before. The EU, both speakers added, is also seeking to seize the geopolitical initiative against a backdrop where there is a strategic necessity for enlargement and a public outpouring of solidarity unthinkable before the war.

But despite the current fanfare, Kobzová and van Middelaar warned that the EU must first clear not one but multiple obstacles that threaten to act as spoilers and bring the sudden burst of optimism about enlargement to an abrupt halt. While the speakers, for instance, agreed that the bloc has presently proven willing to set aside old debates pitting efforts to deepen and reform the EU against aspirations to enlarge it, van Middelaar told the room that as accession target dates gradually creep closer, numerous issues will begin to dawn on Member States. These include the implications of another round of enlargement on political power, the budget, security, and rule of law. In this regard, van Middelaar suggested that EU leaders should be pragmatic in managing expectations, getting the balance right between giving Ukraine the necessary incentives and avoiding making false promises. The recent grain dispute between Ukraine

and several Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries underlines how constructive relationships can quickly unravel when government officials are faced with kitchen table issues detrimentally affecting their electorates, including powerful groups like farmers. EU governments need to confront this challenge head on now by gaining buy-in from wary populaces well before 2030, when electorates in some Member States, like France, will get a chance to express their opinions via referendums.

Though the rule of law debate has been currently shelved as part of accession negotiations in favour of geopolitical considerations, Kobzová said such core governance issues will and should become more pertinent as enlargement approaches and could potentially stop the process in its tracks. The EU must learn the lessons of past enlargement cycles by ensuring that reforms in prospective members are this time sustained post-membership. The erosion of democracy, independent judiciaries, and press freedoms in some CEE countries over the past decade, in this regard, will justifiably or not raise the bar on new candidates. Driving the message home, van Middelaar reminded the room that although enlargement lends the EU considerable geopolitical leverage, this sway diminishes significantly once countries actually join the bloc.

The rule of law matter, according to Kobzová, is also closely interconnected with a range of other issues, including the (over-)use of vetoes on sanctions, critical foreign policy decisions, and some budgetary actions. If the bloc is to proceed with enlargement, the flipside is that it first needs to find common cause and cohesion at home (or perhaps agree to procedural reforms) if it is to avoid becoming even more unwieldy. Kobzová suggested the renewed dialogue on migration in the EU reflects a realisation among a growing number of the 2004 accession States that they can do more to tackle problems when they are united, providing precisely the impetus the bloc needs to address other issues and reform processes.



“A year ago, accession was kind of a promise that one day Ukraine will become an EU member. But the future is getting closer every day, and so Ukraine and other candidate countries are becoming impatient. Now 20 months into the war, it has started to dawn on leaders and electorates that Ukraine will one day, in all likelihood, become a member. But what does that actually mean for the EU?”

Luuk van Middelaar



Voices of VMC2023

“For us at Fragomen VMC offers the opportunity to promote a private sector perspective on migration management. At VMC 2023 we advocated for more robust legal frameworks for labour migration – a topic that is rightly gaining attention. VMC will grow stronger if it will include private sector stakeholders even more organically in migration policy conversations.”

Jo Antoons
Managing Partner, Fragomen



“The generation that is coming of age now feels completely at home in the European Union. For the generation of my parents, Central Europe was their home. For today’s youth, the EU is their oyster. This is their civilisational and relational space. This is where they want to be.”

Jana Kobzová



Voices of VMC2023

“Migration governance is a complex balancing act and extreme narratives do not help find necessary common ground. VMC provides a much-needed space for decision makers to exchange lessons learned and best practices towards fact-based and solution-oriented migration policies that are both humane and rigorous.”

Dimitris Kairidis
Minister of Migration and Asylum,
Greece

The trajectory of the war in Ukraine will prove integral to the future of enlargement, too, with Russia’s aggression soon to enter a third year. On that front, while Ukraine has recaptured over 50 per cent of its territory from Russia, Kobzová warned that gains from the counteroffensive have proven thinner than many hoped as Ukrainian troops try to make headway in the ‘most heavily mined territory on Earth.’ This sluggish progress could have potential repercussions for the overall length of the conflict. The EU must work strenuously to bridge internal schisms, reinforce public resolve, and strengthen its cooperation with Ukraine to ensure Kyiv emerges victorious. Even though the Kremlin’s persistent aggression could prove formidable, Kobzová stressed a silver lining, arguing that the war has united Europe behind the cause of enlargement. As the conflict drags on, Moscow also faces growing costs, the crippling effects of sanctions, ammunition shortages, internal divisions, and declining morale.

Russia’s aggression is also promoting strategic convergence between East and West and providing additional voice to a CEE region that has not always been at the centre of EU policy-making processes. Though the CEE region faces its share of demographic challenges, Kobzová observed that her younger generation is also bringing a more EU-centric approach to politics. And while analysts tend to place dividing lines between Member States on EU integration, Kobzová aptly stressed that the largest gulfs typically now lie between pro- and anti-EU groups within individual countries. The EU, in this regard, would be prudent to reinforce and elevate these youth voices across the CEE region to promote further cohesion that will enable the bloc to realise its geopolitical visions.



→ Watch the full panel discussion!



In conversation

A Pan-African vision for safe and secure cross-border movements

ON STAGE

Minata Samate Cessouma, Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, African Union Commission
Mojisola Sodeinde, Head of Region, West Africa, ICMPD



The African continent is currently facing significant challenges due to persistent conflicts, instability, and the effects of climate change. These issues are creating a substantial strain on migration governance, exacerbating the complexities of migratory movements and putting the lives of forcibly displaced individuals in peril. Against this challenging backdrop, the African Union (AU) is seeking to reconcile the dual necessities of managing border controls and addressing humanitarian concerns, while aligning its mandate with the harsh realities on the ground.

In a one-on-one conversation, marking her second consecutive appearance at VMC, Minata Samate Cessouma, AU Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, provided attendees with a comprehensive update on the region's challenges and opportunities. Focusing on the strategies employed by governments, she outlined Africa's approach to ensuring secure and safe migration within the continent. Commissioner Samate Cessouma also discussed how Africa, Europe, and other relevant stakeholders can join forces to improve standards and practices for managing cross-border movements. The interview was conducted by Mojisola Sodeinde, ICMPD Head of Region, West Africa.

Samate Cessouma expressed her concerns that conflicts, instability, and terrorist activities continue to be among the primary drivers of migration across Africa, affecting millions of internally displaced persons. She pointed out that the recent wave of military coups not only reflects public discontent but also heightens the risk of deepening disillusionment, creating opportunities for criminal groups, human smugglers, and trafficking networks to exploit vulnerable individuals. While acknowledging that the long-term solution lies in improving political, economic, and social governance, she urgently called for expanded efforts to ensure migrants fleeing economic hardship and violence can do so safely, while preserving their human dignity.



“We need to improve our political, economic, and social governance so that our young people don’t need to migrate. If they want to migrate, they need to be able to do so in a safe and dignified manner.”

Minata Samate Cessouma

Meanwhile, the AU continues to serve as the linchpin for fostering sustained cooperation across the five regions of the continent, crucial in a context where 60 per cent of migrants move to other African countries. The Commissioner emphasised that the AU Charter identifies borders not as barriers but as instruments to promote peace, security, and stability and facilitate regional integration in Africa. While labour mobility is often seen as synonymous with movement between, for instance, Africa and Europe, she highlighted the immense demand for talent closer to home. Expanded participation in free trade and

free movement within the AU will empower Africa to better leverage these home-grown skills and bolster its economy.

The AU's approach to migration governance is structured around five pillars, each designed to guide its Member States towards effortless and unrestricted movement across borders. This strategy focuses on facilitating mobility and exchange between border communities that often share close cultural affinity. Samate Cessouma cited the emergence of 'one-stop borders', particularly in Western and Eastern Africa, such as the Togo-Burkina Faso border, as a tangible sign of progress. These special borders enable swift transit through passport control, fostering seamless movement between countries. Their success has prompted the East Africa region to introduce a comprehensive framework to facilitate broader implementation.

While universal free movement within the entire AU remains an aspiration, the Commissioner stressed that good governance, a secure environment, and effective border management are essential prerequisites. The AU, she said, is currently prioritising the enhancement of police and intelligence cooperation to prevent terrorists and other high-risk individuals from crossing borders. Additionally, a new

framework has been finalised by the AU to combat and prevent human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants.

Addressing the resettlement of refugees, including those in Libya, remains a pressing concern. However, the issue is complex due to widespread apprehension among populations about terrorism and crime. Commissioner Samate Cessouma emphasised that displaced individuals fleeing natural disasters or conflicts should not be blamed for their plight. In collaboration with UNHCR and other partners, the AU is working to settle migrants from Libya to Rwanda, Nigeria, and potentially other countries through Memorandums of Understanding. She commended Equatorial Guinea for its exemplary role in refugee resettlement and Uganda for its success in integrating migrants into local communities. The AU, for its part, can help with capacity building to enable countries to sustainably reintegrate migrants into society. Samate Cessouma highlighted the potential role that the AU-EU-UN Task Force, with the support of UNHCR and IOM, could play in this mission.

Challenges related to migration and its underlying causes cannot be tackled by any single country. The complexity of the contemporary migration landscape underscored by climate change is a testament to the need for cross-regional cooperation and multi-issue partnership. Samate Cessouma emphasised that partnerships should evolve to encompass all relevant stakeholders, adapting to the dynamic of political entities and institutions. The Commissioner concluded: 'Together we are strong and together we can build the Africa we want – based on peace, security, and stability for all.'



ference



In conversation

People on the move: Protecting lives, managing borders

ON STAGE

Vincent Cochetel, Special Envoy of the UNHCR for the Western and Central Mediterranean Situation
Jonas Grimheden, Head of the Fundamental Rights Office, Frontex

MODERATION

Marija Raus, Head of Region a.i., Silk Routes, ICMPD

Around the world, thousands of migrants risk their lives every year by taking dangerous land and sea migration routes. Repeated tragedies in the Mediterranean have highlighted Europe's failure to protect individuals attempting to reach its southern shores. Addressing this issue, the panel focused on the policy frictions that can arise when people are on the move and explored how and with whom pragmatic solutions can be forged to ensure safe migration while keeping populations secure in transit and destination countries.

Speakers included Vincent Cochetel, Special Envoy of the UNHCR for the Western and Central Mediterranean Situation, and Jonas Grimheden, Head of the Fundamental Rights Office at Frontex. The session was moderated by Marija Raus, ICMPD Head of Region a.i., Silk Routes.

From the outset, the session delivered a resounding message: A straw poll of the audience revealed that most attendees felt that securing borders and respecting human rights need not conflict. Both panellists advocated for science- and evidence-based approaches to understanding mixed migratory movements and managing them

effectively. Cochetel cautioned against 'convenient lies,' emphasising the challenging path forward on reducing irregular arrivals. Though easing legal migratory pathways is laudable, for instance, he said it is unlikely to affect irregular movements. However, he suggested that the New Pact on Migration and Asylum could bring the EU halfway in securing its borders by, for example, enhancing the capacity of Member States to carry out screenings of arrivals. Cochetel also stressed the need to address returns with partners through multifaceted solutions and persistent dialogue. The root causes of irregular migration, including economic hardship and instability, must also be part of these discussions.



“Border management that is not in compliance with fundamental rights is counterproductive. Frontex should elevate its minimum professional standards to lead and serve as a role model in Europe and beyond.”

Jonas Grimheden

The European Integrated Border Management Strategy, for its part, will help to elevate human rights compliance when managing borders, according to Grimheden. He called for better integration of human rights training and capacity building into all initiatives and programmes, arguing that doing so will foster trust with migrants and citizens. However, if the EU wants to forge more substantial progress, Grimheden noted, it needs to carry out routine, comprehensive oversight of all border management procedures to ensure they abide by human rights standards and EU law. Recurring procedural mistakes, in

turn, must be documented, rectified, and flagged as part of standard training so that they do not happen again. Many violations are flagrant: violence against migrants, the seizure of personal belongings, and involuntary returns without appropriate processing and screening procedures. These human rights encroachments must be explicitly condemned across all EU Member States.

While Frontex cannot compel Member States to uphold professional standards, Grimheden said it can play an important role in setting a high benchmark, monitoring the management of the EU’s external borders, and advocating for improvements. Before remedying errors, Cochetel and Grimheden agreed on the necessity of discerning whether violations are deliberate



“There should never be preconditions to dialogue where humanitarian imperatives are at stake. We talk to a variety of governments around the world – we have to do it because that’s the way solutions are found.”

Vincent Cochetel

acts or the product of bad policies, insufficient resources, or poor training. The EU, they said, should prioritise transparency and accountability via incident reports so as to avoid fostering a culture of impunity. The bloc should further put in place mechanisms that facilitate and enable good practices.

International cooperation was presented as a means to enhance compliance with human rights standards. However, challenges can emerge where partners do not share the same values or prioritise them differently. Cochetel advocated for dialogue without preconditions, especially when humanitarian needs are at stake. And while ironing out all differences may not always be possible, it is usually feasible to find some common ground and shared interests, which can serve as the foundation for a working relationship. Cochetel pointed to the Valletta Plan of Action as a testament to the ability to achieve compromises. He suggested revitalising and building on such existing plans rather than necessarily creating new ones.

In cases where partners fail to uphold professional standards, it is essential to ascertain whether it is due to values differences or capacity constraints. If discrepancies are apparent, Grimheden urged caution in donating equipment or intrusive technology posing a risk to privacy or data protection. He added that governments first need to empower relevant independent monitoring agencies, including national human rights institutions, and equip them with the capacity to conduct oversight. That said, Cochetel argued that in some situations, such as combating human trafficking, third-party restrictions on sharing data and intelligence can hinder the protection of individuals at risk of exploitation. These diverging considerations only reiterate the quandary the EU faces between safeguarding human rights and securing borders.



Voices of VMC2023

“VMC creates a space for frank discussions on durable solutions to migratory challenges, for example measures to increase return rates from Europe.”

Maria Malmer Stenergard
Minister of Migration, Sweden

→ Watch the full panel discussion!



In conversation

People on the move: Shared leadership for safe and orderly migration

ON STAGE

Peter Webinger, Director-General for Migration and International Affairs, Federal Ministry of the Interior, Austria

Donya Smida, Regional Portfolio Manager and Head of Tunis Office, ICMPD



After the preceding panel set the stage on how to navigate key frictions and dilemmas in migration governance, especially concerning irregular arrivals, this session assessed the state of cooperation between African and European partners on ensuring safe and orderly migration.

The discussion, featuring Peter Webinger, Director-General for Migration and International Affairs at the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, centred on how the challenges posed by migration involve global dynamics and cannot be effectively addressed by any one actor or region alone. The interview was conducted by Donya Smida, ICMPD Regional Portfolio Manager and Head of Tunis Office.

While migration partnerships are often crafted as responses to specific problems, demanding significant resource investments, Webinger emphasised that building partnerships is no easy feat. Governments, for instance, do not always align on priorities or values. Likewise, despite universal standards and ideals, societies may interpret migration phenomena differently based on their backgrounds or past experiences

with migration. Finally, frictions may also emerge from the diverse challenges societies face, spanning from state fragility in countries of origin to safeguarding social harmony in destination countries.

Prerequisites for a successful partnership, Webinger said, include a mutual willingness to better understand each other's positions and empathise with different perspectives. In this regard, the scheduling of regular formal meetings proved to be a successful approach for the Austria-Morocco migration partnership. The early stages of a partnership are also an opportune time, he said, to identify shared interests and focus on low-hanging fruit to nurture trust. For instance, the Austria-Morocco migration partnership laid a robust foundation through bilateral cooperation on consular affairs matters. Above all, potential partners should resist the urge to thrust the most contentious issues, such as returns, on the table, especially if they predominantly concern only one party. Doing so could not only impede the relationship but also complicate efforts to attain their goals even if the divisive issue, paradoxically, initially prompted the partnership.

While the Team Europe approach is the favoured model for migration partnerships with other countries and regions, there is still a role for bilateral deals where either European agreements are lacking or where bilateral partnerships complement, rather than supersede, EU relationships. Successful bilateral collaboration on select issues can serve as exemplars, paving





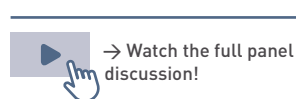
“Trust is something that develops in the process, and sometimes the process is even more important than the result.”

Peter Webinger

the way forward for broader cooperation between Europe and partners. Nevertheless, EU Member States must adapt more effectively to the current global landscape. Webinger lamented that governments still allocate 90 per cent of their migration management budgets to pre-globalisation setups emphasising sovereign border protection, even when thousands of migrants perish every year attempting perilous crossings, for example, in the Mediterranean. A post-globalisation design, he suggested, should recognise that the closest interlinkages between countries, including the mobility of people, are not necessarily confined to places sharing territorial borders.

Migration partnerships, furthermore, provide a platform for experimenting with innovative policies that would be unfeasible in a go-it-alone strategy. The establishment of regional processing centres by the US in various Latin American countries to (pre-)screen people for different migratory pathways, including asylum and labour mobility, serves as a notable example. While Webinger recommended the EU Commission to explore similar pilot projects with partner countries, he warned that programmes that appear initially promising can encounter implementation challenges or run into numerous obstacles in the field. Nonetheless, he stressed that such pilot projects present opportunities to probe and refine different ideas, contributing in their own small way to solutions for people on

the move and countries seeking to secure their borders. Echoing an opinion voiced in the preceding panel, Webinger cautioned against conflating labour mobility and irregular migration in policy discussions, asserting that the two are distinct issues and not directly related. Pairing the two pathways, he concluded, risks complicating the issue and could have detrimental effects on public opinion.



Voices of VMC2023

“For UNHCR, VMC is a key date in the calendar as the conference provides a unique opportunity to meet experts from various horizons. Participants are able to express opinions in a more open manner than during existing formal processes related to migration and asylum.”

Vincent Cochetel
Special Envoy of the UNHCR for the
Western and Central Mediterranean
Situation

Panel discussion

A vision for Europe's migration policy framework

ON STAGE

Javier Conde y Martínez de Irujo, Deputy Director-General for Justice and Home Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Spain

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

Jean-Louis De Brouwer, Director, European Affairs Programme, Egmont Institute

MODERATION

Sarah Schlaeger, Senior Lead Policy and Liaison, Brussels Mission, ICMPD



Migration, often a divisive issue, will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of Europe's integration process and significantly contribute to defining its external action. The breakthrough political agreement on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum at the end of 2023 marked a key step towards a long-awaited overhaul of European migration governance.

Yet, amid a series of appalling tragedies in the Mediterranean and an uptick in arrivals to Europe, this year's EU panel toured various areas in which national responses remain insufficient and discussed the Pact's possible impact in terms of filling some of the existing gaps while strengthening EU-level migration governance overall.

Representing Spain's Council Presidency, Javier Conde y Martínez de Irujo, Deputy Director-General for Justice and Home Affairs at the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union, and Cooperation, first took stock of how far we have come. Two additional distinguished speakers, Ulrich Weinbrenner, Director General for Migration, Refugees, and Return Policy at the German Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, and Jean-Louis De Brouwer, Director of the European Affairs Programme at Egmont Institute, then chimed in on the most recent developments in European migration governance. The session, moderated by Sarah Schlaeger, ICMPD Senior Lead for Policy and Liaison,

also examined what may lie ahead as migration remains front and centre in discussions among European decision-makers and publics.

At VMC2022, the EU panel scrutinised whether the bloc would be able to 'break the gridlock' and broker an agreement on the Pact. A year later, panellists declared the Pact negotiations a strategic success and the extraordinary joint product of multiple Council presidencies. Although at the time of the conversation the final details still needed to be ironed out, Conde y Martínez de Irujo commended the compromises already made to get to that point. The Deputy Director-General stated that the Pact represents a decisive step towards establishing Europe's first truly genuinely comprehensive policy on asylum and migration addressing the overlapping and obsolete rules currently in place. The agreement underscores the EU's *raison d'être* as an organisation that can promote European unity and forge progress on key issues facing the continent.

Conde y Martínez de Irujo stressed that the crisis in the Mediterranean, far from being an obstacle to finalising the Pact, serves as a reminder of the need for a deal and the necessity of devising new instruments to make the EU a more agile and capable actor. He pointed out that the 20 per cent rise in irregular arrivals in the EU and 30 per cent spike in applications for international protection at this point are par for the course as far as

“Migration governance cannot just be about irregular migration – it must be about creating a comprehensive model that also includes legal pathways.”

Javier Conde y Martínez de Irujo



“The task ahead could be just as much about managing distrust as building trust.”

Jean-Louis De Brouwer

migration crises in Europe go. The Pact, for its part, will bolster the EU’s reactive capabilities, making it better able to manage migratory flows in the spirit of shared responsibility, cooperation, and mutual trust. However, he noted that the deadly migrant crossings along migratory routes, including the Mediterranean and the Sahara, highlight the pressing need for the EU to develop a more anticipatory and preventative strategy to overcome the permanent crisis mode that has plagued the EU’s migration policy. He also urged the EU to develop a more holistic approach in the future, incorporating legal migratory pathways.

The current uptick in arrivals, however, could undermine efforts to promote labour mobility and legal pathways, as well as voluntary schemes to resettle and integrate refugees from Afghanistan and the Mediterranean. According to Weinbrenner, the rising political salience of migration has fuelled increased polarisation in Germany, complicating efforts to start conversations with the public about addressing workplace gaps through migration. He pointed out that municipal and county governments have become increasingly vocal about housing shortages, with some contemplating morally dubious actions, such as the use of tents to accommodate unaccompanied minors. Although these challenges could hamper Member States from leveraging legal pathways and building on momentum to



Voices of VMC2023

“Factors that influence migration can differ widely from one country or region to another. VMC provides an opportune platform for interactions, taking into cognizance African perspectives, welcoming migration for development conversations and, reminding us all of a more inclusive and solution-oriented approach towards safe, regular, and dignified migration.”

Minata Samate Cessouma
Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian
Affairs and Social Development, African
Union Commission

strengthen labour migration policies in the short term, Weinbrenner noted that they have reaffirmed the importance of establishing a common European asylum system, along with reinvigorated efforts to secure international agreements on external dimensions, including returns.

While the panellists recognised the significance of enhanced European asylum and processing procedures for winning public opinion, they also warned that the implementation process would be cumbersome, from the application of regulations to the physical construction of border infrastructure. The plan is unlikely to take effect before 2026, necessitating effective communication to avoid a mismatch between expectations and actions, which could lead to further disillusionment with EU migration policy. A critical aspect to public relations should also involve evaluating the return on investment for the substantial funds allocated to implementing the Pact. De Brouwer suggested that post-implementation assessments should weigh the costs and benefits against alternative options for the appropriations, such as development aid or integration and training programmes for arrivals.

At the same time, De Brouwer emphasised the need to manage distrust among Member States and partners, especially considering the opposition of Hungary and Poland (prior to its 2023 parliamentary elections) to the Pact. He also highlighted potential sources of friction, such as several escape clauses in the agreement. While the deal provides an opportunity to rebuild trust in an area where solidarity has been sorely lacking, De Brouwer and Weinbrenner called for the EU Commission to better fulfil its role as the guardian of the EU treaties by conducting oversight ensuring that all Member States adhere to their legal obligations.

The Grenada European Council declaration envisioned an EU that would bring itself into closer ‘engagement with partners from all regions of the world’ and ‘mobilise and

“There is a very broad perception that there can only be a European solution to migration and the New Pact is that solution.”

Ulrich Weinbrenner

develop our external action instrument.’ De Brouwer suggested the bloc should live up to these words in its migration governance by avoiding silos and prioritising the issue as part of its global agenda. Indeed, while irregular flows once only affected a limited number of Member States, Belarus’ instrumentalisation of migration has underlined that every country could be impacted at any time. The next crisis cannot always be predicted even as some relevant trends can be discerned, such as population growth in Africa. The entire bloc will, therefore, benefit from an updated toolbox and joint approach on asylum by improving preparedness before the next crisis occurs.

The speakers concluded with several sharp warnings, noting the potential for a return to differentiated integration and opt-outs, especially after future EU enlargement. They agreed there is no ‘Plan B’ or workable alternative to the Pact. The recent reintroduction of internal border checks across multiple Member States highlights the problematic direction migration policy can take in the absence of agreed principles and approaches at the EU level. There was a broad agreement that the present flawed and outdated system based on a patchwork of national laws and narrow interests does not serve Europe nor any individual member state well.



→ Watch the full panel discussion!



Conference closing

ON STAGE

Victoria Rietig, Head, Migration Program, German Council on Foreign Relations

Ana Sofia Walsh, Senior Knowledge Manager, Fragomen

Laura Dubois, EU correspondent for migration, Financial Times

MODERATION

Malin Frankenhaeuser, Head of Policy and VMC Lead, ICMPD



VMC2023 concluded with representatives from the media, think tank community, and private sector sharing their insights on the themes explored during the conference, with a view to understanding what is likely to come next in migration governance. Speakers identified topics that deserve closer scrutiny and further debate, thus kicking off the process leading to VMC2024.

Malin Frankenhaeuser, ICMPD Head of Policy and VMC Lead, moderated the session, welcoming Victoria Rietig, Head of the Migration Program at the German Council on Foreign Relations; Ana Sofia Walsh, Senior Knowledge Manager at Fragomen; and Laura Dubois, EU correspondent for migration at the Financial Times.

The conference struck a positive tone on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. Yet, VMC panellists also focused on key lessons learnt and potential challenges ahead, from interpretation of the Pact's long-negotiated language to the crucial test posed by the effective implementation of the new provisions. Based on her reporting from Brussels, Dubois cautioned about outstanding challenges, noting that it remains to be seen to what extent the Pact will be able to remedy a lack of trust among Member States that had become almost structural until the recent developments. Dubois also noted that, as the EU elections approach, migration will continue to polarise public opinion, possibly leading to a more migration-sceptic European Parliament.

Commenting on VMC2023's consensus on the need for strong migration partnerships, Rietig argued that the EU needs a smarter rather than a more assertive carrot-and-stick approach to achieve migration cooperation. Though the use of incentives can be an important instrument in migration partnerships, the results may be more

modest than anticipated. Success is more likely with countries dependent on EU aid, as opposed to those with geopolitical leverage over the bloc. Rietig further emphasised the need for the EU to balance efforts to influence partners, such as through offering more generous development cooperation, with broader geopolitical priorities, as exemplified by the Global Gateway Initiative. She reminded attendees that the EU is not the only global actor, and rivals could offer enticing deals with far fewer strings attached. Similarly, acknowledging multiple appeals made by Global South participants at VMC, Dubois stressed that the EU must be an all-weather partner, recognising partnerships as a two-way street, to build effective and sustained cooperation.

“Our carrots are not sweet enough and our sticks are not scary enough to really make a difference and to really get anywhere.”

Victoria Rietig



Legal migratory pathways took centre stage at VMC2023, with speakers repeatedly highlighting Europe's demographic challenges and the urgency of attracting talent to address workplace shortages. The expanding EU toolbox will include instruments ranging from an enhanced EU Blue Card to a Talent Pool matching individuals in countries of origin with employers in need of workers, all aimed at enabling non-EU nationals to pursue opportunities for permanent residence in Europe. Walsh stressed the consensus in many destination countries around formulating a whole-of-society approach to making legal pathways work, involving cooperation between government agencies, enterprises, and civil society groups. These partnerships are needed to facilitate hiring by businesses and improve the quality of life of European cities to entice highly skilled individuals to come and stay with their families. She also advocated for a pivot away from equating skills with qualifications to embracing non-traditional skill sets that are essential to the future of work and building climate resilience. As part of this shift, governments should collaborate more with higher



“There’s still a traditional mindset in many European countries in terms of equating skills with qualifications. Particularly as we turn our attention to the climate transition, it will be non-traditional skill sets that we need.”

Ana Sofia Walsh



Voices of VMC2023

“VMC is much more than ICMPD’s flagship conference. It is the yearly appointment European policy makers like myself look forward to with a view to engaging – on and off stage – with all major stakeholders in migration policy. As we reform migration governance at the EU level, we need a platform like VMC to focus on key decision points and on cooperative solutions.”

Margaritis Schinas
Vice-President for Promoting our European Way of Life, European Commission

education institutions to develop appropriate curricula and relevant skills.

The follow-the-science refrain voiced during several panels, in this vein, was commended by Walsh and Rietig. Collaboration via public-private talent partnerships and the ICMPD-implemented Migration Partnership Facility, for instance, can enhance best practices and scale up initiatives. VMC, meanwhile, can facilitate dialogue through cross-functional panels among actors working towards common goals. Walsh also called for mainstreaming impact assessments on migration into international agreements, such as trade deals, and refining them based on findings. Finally, she highlighted digitalisation as an area where EU Member States currently face a patchwork of national readiness, in contrast to the EU, which has a strong digital agenda to establish smart borders.



Despite all the tools, partnerships, and pacts, further progress will depend on the EU winning the battle for public opinion. Concurring with the consensus articulated at VMC that migration is associated with toxic and polarising debates, Rietig said it is critical for the migration policy community to use communication tools to influence public discussions. Governments need to be candid with the public, acknowledging migration as a fact of life and an intrinsic component of Europe. Addressing the root causes of migration, Dubois added, requires efforts to confront issues like economic hardship, conflict, terrorism, poor governance, lack of opportunity, and climate change. Rietig and Dubois suggested the involvement of governments, civil society organisations, and think tanks in various public engagement efforts to combat racism and xenophobia. Rietig further urged the preparation of suitable classroom materials for primary and secondary schools and universities, stating that through these educational activities, the ‘politically impossible’ can become reality.

“We need to somehow explain to the public that migration is just a part of Europe. It is not something that will go away with policy. It’s not something that we can solve merely with innovative solutions, which run the risk of eroding human rights.”

Laura Dubois



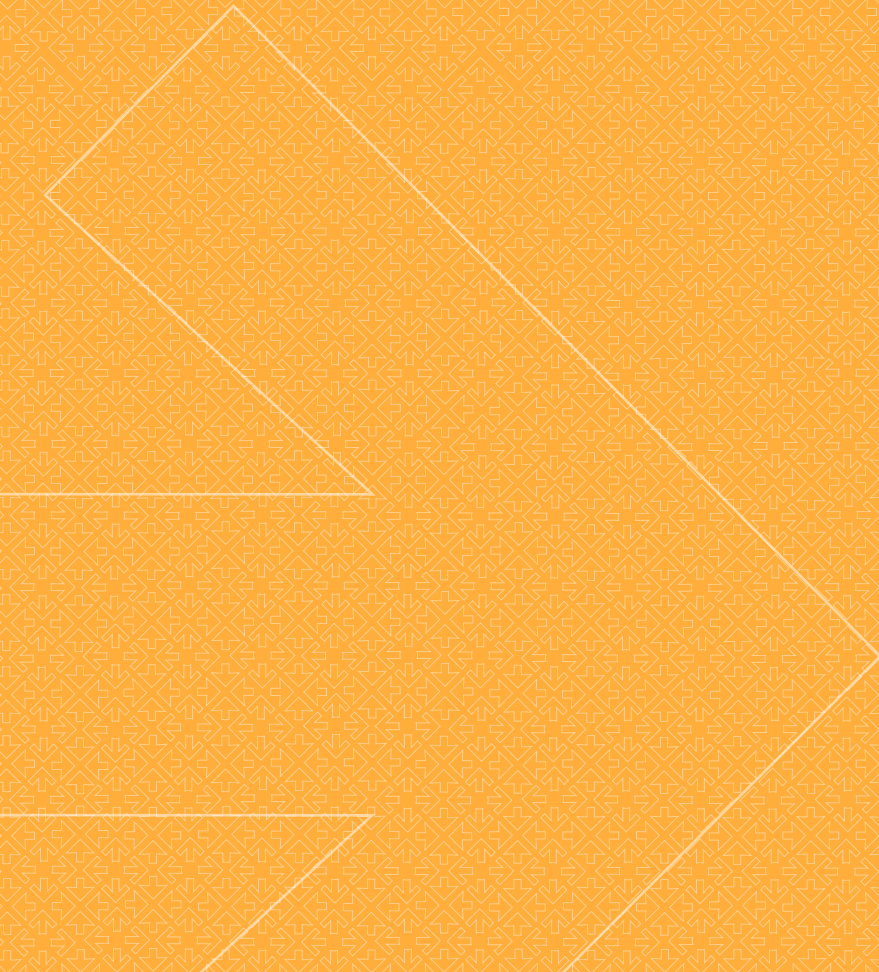
→ Watch the full panel discussion!



③ SPEA



KERS





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Director General
ICMPD



Susanne Raab
Federal Minister for Women, Family,
Integration and Media
Austria



Atilla Toros
President of the Presidency of
Migration Management
Ministry of Interior
Türkiye



Lukas Gehrke
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Malin Frankenhaeuser
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Minata Samate Cessouma
 Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian
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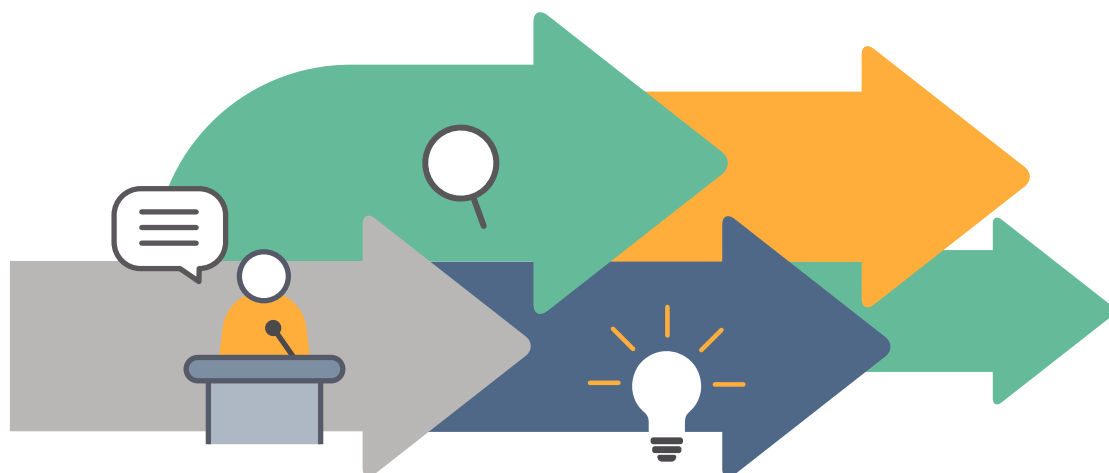
ICMPD strives to ensure an inclusive working environment and be attentive to gender diversity and the plurality of voices represented in our initiatives. When this is not reflected in our events, it is due to the unavailability of speakers or challenges in identifying suitable profiles in our network.

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REFLECTIONS





Five takeaways for strengthening migration governance for the future

VMC2023 featured two days of intensive and wide-ranging discussions exploring new and old factors shaping the movement of people and how policymakers and other actors could respond. During the discussion, participants shared a variety of experiences, perspectives, and recommendations for the future.

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Since last year's Vienna Migration Conference (VMC), multiple new conflicts, coups, and instances of civil unrest have erupted across the globe. This instability joins an already daunting list of challenges – climate change, the rising cost of living, widespread labour shortages, and economic hardship – impacting the movement of people within and across borders. The constantly evolving landscape emphatically underscores the need for international discussions that assess the current state of migration governance and critically scrutinise where we should go from here.

In this context, the eighth annual VMC took place 10-11 October 2023, gathering key stakeholders from the migration policy community. Discussions centred on pressing topics in migration governance, including how to facilitate safe and regular migration, protect the rights of people on the move at borders, promote labour mobility to address workplace shortages, and build a better future of work together. Throughout the two-day event, an eclectic mix of speakers took stock of the present landscape and shared successful initiatives and ideas for the road ahead. Here are 5 key takeaways from these discussions:

Five fresh takeaways

1 Concerted efforts must be made to promote safe migration

Facing various pressures, thousands of migrants and refugees risk their lives every year by taking dangerous land and sea migration routes, not least across the Sahara and the Mediterranean. Against this backdrop, border and immigration control agencies must prioritise the safety and security of both their own population and people on the move. A consensus indeed prevailed among VMC participants that desired policy solutions securing borders and respecting the human rights of people on the move do not contradict each other. Speakers underscored that effective border management – as with all law enforcement – depends on the trust of people, whether nationals whose borders are concerned or people who cross these borders. Border management that fails to comply with human rights standards is not only a violation of core obligations but could also prove counterproductive as it risks losing public support and confidence.

To safeguard human rights at Europe's international borders, speakers stressed the importance of building sufficient capacity for monitoring bodies to ensure that standard operating procedures are followed in compliance with human rights. When mistakes are made, they should be reported, investigated, and rectified – and above all not concealed.

Errors should also be incorporated into future training regimes to promote best practices and prevent repeated incidents. Ensuring transparency every step of the way, paired with comprehensive monitoring and oversight, is essential to keep mistakes from happening again.

Improving migration governance further requires maintaining dialogue with all countries and relevant stakeholders. More engagement, in fact, may be needed with those sharing different perspectives,



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even if only to ascertain the source of disagreements. Differences in opinion indeed may stem from a fundamental values divide – or because potential partners lack adequate capacities and resources to fully implement human rights-compliant procedures. The sequencing of activities in support of partners, moreover, is important: Before procuring certain equipment like boats and technology, there must be a commitment and capacity to uphold human rights. The provision of equipment must also be coupled with comprehensive training to ensure responsible and ethical usage. More broadly, a strong framework guiding procedures as well as their monitoring are also key to accountability.

2 To build the workforce we need tomorrow, we must start today.

Current labour shortages, as well as demographic pressures, mean that the need for workers in Europe is set to continue growing. To mitigate this, businesses need strategic and long-term workforce planning – and the same can be said when it comes to governments. Private sector representatives emphasised the need for policymakers to enable employers to hire the workers they need, including those who currently live in other countries.

There are several moving parts for an effective labour migration strategy. Initiatives to match talent with employers are crucial, yet developing the needed skills – and getting them recognised by EU labour markets – are prerequisites to ensuring a pool of talent from which to hire, and this can take time. Meanwhile, neither of these efforts will matter if workers cannot get a visa or work permit, or if procedures take months or even years. Scale is equally important to have a real impact on the job market. Speakers highlighted ways in which current labour migration policies are not always fit for purpose, compounding

the challenges for Europe's attraction and retention of global talent. In addition to long wait times, the conventional labour migration framework is built upon the concept of residence and physical migration for employment purposes and frequently lags behind current developments in the labour market, namely the emergence of non-standard employment arrangements (i.e., remote work, digital nomadism, and hybrid work).

With regard to skills, job seekers must have the skills that are in demand, now and in the future – and here there is more work to be done. Europe should invest in skills, and therefore invest in systems in partner countries, that respond to the needs of labour markets nationally and internationally. Amidst the green transition, newer skills are needed, and migration and mobility can provide opportunities for developing skills in this area. For instance, the circular mobility of people, people, as well as ideas, technologies, and investments, can support the development and application of technical skills in Europe and partner countries. At the same time, skilling should include language training and cultural orientation, enhancing 'soft' skills that are also important in the workplace.

3 The EU can help boost the attractiveness of Europe in the race for global talent.

When it comes to the attraction and retention of international workers, Europe is punching below its weight. In the search for global talent, the EU can bring added value when it comes to the branding and marketing of the region, promoting peer learning, and perhaps even facilitating the intra-EU labour mobility of third-country workers. At the same time, Member States are very much in the driver's





seat when it comes to labour migration pathways and building an enabling environment for international recruitment. Many international workers want access to Europe as a whole – this is a key element setting the region apart from other top economies, although it largely remains behind the frontrunners. To help employers in the EU recruit and retain needed workers, improvements might be made to enable labour migrants to easily move from one Member State to another, whether for in-person or remote work. For instance, the EU can play a role in simplifying the process of moving between countries, so if someone already has a Blue Card, for instance, they do not have to prove again that they are highly skilled.

Many businesses, especially SMEs, are aware of the need to recruit globally, but lack the knowledge and capacity to do so. Supporting them in navigating the migration system will be key, for example, in providing guidance and sharing best practises. This is another instance where the EU could play an important role.

4 The momentum around the Pact is not the end point.

Much was said about the need for a European approach to migration, and many attendees predicted that the Pact on Migration and Asylum would finally be approved after a years-long negotiation process (and indeed it was agreed at the end of 2023). The positive momentum around this milestone agreement should not dissipate but rather be channelled towards the equally important and possibly more difficult implementation phase. Turning the Pact into reality will not be straightforward, especially given the complex legal system in which it is situated, necessitating collaboration from a number of competent authorities

and smart troubleshooting of predictable hiccups along the way. It may also take a while to see the first results, meaning that managing expectations will be important. Sufficient resources to back up the Pact's new migration policy instruments are also a must.

There was a broad consensus that an agreement on the Pact marks a milestone, but is not the final destination. While the Pact tackles some of the thorniest issues, it does less to formulate a positive agenda. Talent policy and labour migration partnerships remain, for instance, areas to be further explored and developed at the EU level.

5 We need to communicate (much) better.

Managing political polarisation within European electorates concerning migration remains a significant challenge to effective migration governance. And speakers observed that the space for dialogue has been shrinking.

In this context, communication is essential, and this is one area in which improvement is sorely needed. As ICMPD's Director General noted, "Our ability to communicate strategically around migration has not seen enough progress. We still do not manage to really explain what we do – and why we do it – to the public, the media, our citizens, and voters. This makes us vulnerable to polarised debates. And it diminishes the space that we need for comprehensive and forward-looking migration policies." It is critical to understand that migration governance cannot advance without securing the approval and backing of our citizens. For instance, to gain public support to recruit more international workers, we must offer greater transparency about the implications of a lack of labour pathways for our economies and welfare systems.

Informing public debate should be high on the agenda – not only because it has a far-reaching impact on other policy areas but also because it is well within our purview to affect it. Insights from the field of psychology can make messaging more effective – underscoring again the need for a multidisciplinary approach to migration.

Carrots and sticks in migration cooperation: Three uncomfortable truths



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Conventional wisdom holds that Europe should use tools from all policy fields, especially the holy trinity of visa, trade, and aid incentives, to reach its migration goals. But what if the prescribed medicine only works for a few patients? New research spells out three uncomfortable truths that should guide Europe's use of carrots and sticks in migration cooperation in the future.

Effective migration partnerships with countries outside of Europe are a declared goal of the European Union and its Member States. But views diverge on what good migration cooperation looks like and which strategies are useful toward different partner countries. A particularly thorny issue is the use of positive and negative incentives. Also known as conditionality, it is debated heatedly in politics, academia – and of course at the Vienna Migration Conference.

Conventional wisdom

“We should not only use the carrot of aid, but the stick of sanctions,” one Migration Minister said during the high-level panel that kicked off the 2023 conference. After all, the argument goes, the credibility of Europe's asylum system hinges not only on granting rights to those who qualify for protection but also on delivering better return results for those who do not. “Without returns, you don't have an asylum system. You have a mockery.”

The belief is simple: If Europe wants to reach its migration goals, it needs to nudge partner countries to comply with its demands by bringing positive incentives to the table, such as visa-free travel, more development funds, trade preferences, legal pathways, diplomatic attention, or military support – but also negative incentives, such as the threat or use of visa restrictions, decreased development cooperation, the suspension of trade privileges, or other disadvantages partner countries might be keen to avoid.

Beware migration myths: Three uncomfortable truths

This belief is not wrong, but it is incomplete. It is a migration myth – often heard, but not backed by facts. Research by the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) shows three uncomfortable truths about the use of carrots and sticks in migration cooperation:

First, their effects are smaller than European governments like to think. Using incentives toward partner countries can achieve (and has in the past had) some of the desired effects, such as the formalisation of migration cooperation through Memoranda of Understanding or other agreements, increased dialogue, and working-level processes. But it often has a rather small impact on the number of returns.

Second, experience shows that deploying carrots and sticks seems to be more effective toward countries that depend on Europe and are of low geopolitical relevance to Brussels and European capitals. Put simply: Threats can get you increased cooperation only if the other side cannot retaliate easily. If the partner country can exert counterpressure, for instance, by limiting security cooperation or border control measures, or even actively supporting or forcing the onward movement of migrants (aka migration instrumentalisation), Europe's sticks are nothing but tiny twigs. Droll to look at. Easy to snap.

The third uncomfortable truth is that Europe is rarely willing to offer the biggest carrot it is shlepping

around. Visa-free access to European soil is high on the wish list of many partner countries, but Europe displays little political will to grant it to most of the countries that want it. This perhaps reasonable, but self-imposed, limitation means that Europe gravitates toward using visas as a negative incentive. But visa restrictions such as those under Art. 25a of the Schengen Borders Code have yet to show significant effects.

DGAP research grants that “the visa lever is the one-eyed among the blind. It is the only lever that is both formalized and established at EU level, it is easiest to use [...] and it can be targeted well to a country’s decision-makers and elites.” But it also finds that “the EU’s visa restrictions are a blunt sword because the visa cannot be taken away, but only made harder to get. The hassle tied to Schengen visa applications is already high under normal circumstances, so increasing the required paperwork, banning multiple entry visas, and adding wait time only seems to have a minimal impact on the number of applications.”

The takeaway: European carrots are often not sweet enough, and its sticks not scary enough.

Better selective than sorry: Change timing and tone

So, what to do with this bleak image? How should governments shape their migration cooperation and use incentives in a less delusional and more realistic manner?

Two steps are needed. The first is to acknowledge that conditionality is often more a rhetorical tool to calm Europeans themselves than a practical tool to change the behaviour of partner countries. Sure, it can work, but Europe achieves its desired results less often than it wants to, and unintended side effects such as backlash in partner countries or even reverse conditionality can make future migration conversations even harder.

The second step is to use incentives more selectively and smartly than in the past. This means changing both timing and tone. Case studies show that partner

countries are often more willing and able to change their cooperation when elections or other changes of power occur because they open windows of opportunity for closer cooperation in all areas, not just migration. Timing matters, perhaps more so than Europe’s use of incentives and threats. Tone also matters. Respectful dialogue and joint public communication are crucial since it allows governments to balance their image needs at home and internationally. This common-sensical advice is, nonetheless, often neglected, as the starkly different messaging of the European Union and Tunisia has shown in recent months.

The winding road can beat the shortcut

Europe will continue to seek migration solutions abroad. It depends on its many neighbours and their willingness to manage migration jointly. Keeping in mind the axiom that “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results,” European countries should shed the delusion that pressuring or pulling partners toward cooperation is the quickest path to reaching migration goals. Shortcuts are tempting but can lead to dead ends. If Europe wants to reach its goals, it needs to take the long and winding road that is migration cooperation. Lasting migration relationships should be based more on facts, mutual interests, continuous engagement, and trust building, and less on tools that sound impressive on paper but have a less impressive track record of changing reality.

Victoria Rietig is an expert in migration, asylum, and refugee policies. She is Head of the Migration Program at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), a think tank based in Berlin, and co-author of the report “Conditionality in migration cooperation: Beyond carrots, sticks, and delusions.”



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Europe as a hotspot for global talent – Is it ready?



Author



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Though Europe has come a long way, it is not yet ready to be the leading talent destination of the world. Despite progress, there are obstacles that leaders and practitioners across Europe must still overcome before the region can call itself the place where the global labour market comes to live, study, and work. An emphasis on ‘living’ is more important than ever in this equation.

At the Vienna Migration Conference 2023, we heard repeatedly that countries are facing significant labour shortages. We also heard that many businesses want to look outside their countries, and beyond the EU, to hire needed workers. Those who are already doing so have reported difficulties due to existing policies, framework conditions, and procedures around work permits.

In parallel, the annual meeting of the European Talent Mobility Forum in Barcelona provided an opportunity for myself and other stakeholders to navigate these issues at a practical level. The event convened representatives from governments, regional economic development boards, and cities working with international talent attraction from across Europe.

At both events, it became clear that businesses are hiring, and place stakeholders are heavily engaged and active in this area. But they are struggling – and they need more support from policymakers to make it happen.

Industry developments

It feels like unprecedented times in the industry as investment promotion, tourism, and talent attraction converge towards the same mission. The foreign direct investor, for instance, now needs to draw on local talent and is often involved in relocating management as well. Modern tourists, meanwhile, increasingly find themselves working remotely, at least informally, through ‘workcations’, and in fact could be considered a potential target in the short to medium term for talent attraction, provided they have a positive experience while visiting. And what about entrepreneurs or start-up companies participating

in international accelerator programmes – is it not a great opportunity to retain them in the region once they have graduated?

The conventional image of the ‘expat’ is now obsolete. While the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields are perhaps most associated with talent attraction initiatives, the business community has a more all-encompassing focus in practice, ranging from healthcare professionals to service industry workers and teachers, to name a few. Or, for example, electricians, with the green transition front and centre.

Furthermore, since the pandemic, diaspora engagement has become an even higher priority for places, with individuals living abroad seen as potential returnees to their home countries, investors, and/or working professionals.

Remote and nomad work is both fascinating and challenging from an economic development perspective, where the direct and indirect effects are different and, well, complicated. These arrangements bring opportunities for companies and workers who are seeking to balance their life and career.

Meanwhile, it remains to be seen how far generative AI, bots, and digitalisation will take us and where that will leave us concerning the skills and competences needed for the future and accompanying talent attraction endeavours.

Choosing Europe?

For global talent, Europe is an option but not the destination for them to live, study, and work. In this

context, policymakers, place promoters, employers, and other key stakeholders must ask: Why would Europe be their choice? And what challenges do we need to overcome to be that choice? Here are four key elements that stand out:

Maturity (or the lack of it) among companies in the field of international talent attraction, onboarding, and retention remains a hindrance. Enterprises say they want international talent but often appear unprepared once collaboration with the public sector starts. A lack of competence in this area, the need to wade into unknown territory, and a “this is more difficult than local recruiting” realisation are some of the barriers faced by employers.

True integration means cultural onboarding across all aspects of the life cycle, requiring public and private partnerships. While migration and integration are sometimes perceived more as technical terms related to legal pathways and work permits, we need to emphasise holistic societal inclusion as part of initiatives aimed at relocating and retaining individuals and families.

Attracting skilled workers amid more hostile (political) climates has emerged as a particularly pressing challenge. While some governments are prone to favour locally unemployed and underemployed people and those in need, others are disposed to closing borders entirely – and others fall somewhere in between. Meanwhile, there are no votes in non-voters, and internationals often cannot vote in national elections. Even though politicians generally recognise that relocating workers do not steal local jobs, they create them, embracing this stance is not always politically expedient.

Finally, while Europe is a known quantity generally, it lacks the same branding and appeal when it comes to being a career destination.

What does the data tell us?

At Future Place Leadership, we recently partnered with Linköping Science Park in Sweden on a migration study of 2,600 global talents and 300 companies across Europe. The conclusions serve as prudent recommendations for Europe to elevate its performance in the global talent race.

Work-life balance takes the lead as the main factor influencing people’s decisions on whether to live in another country, followed by general opportunities for developing a career and specific job offers. Places and employers, therefore, need to help each other and focus on enhancing the quality of life beyond the workplace. It is not about the location or the job: It is about both.

Barriers to living in another country, according to respondents, include (in the following order) distance from family and friends, a lack of hospitality, and challenges in (re)building a social life and social network. While the distance hurdle may not be easy to address, societies can strive to make themselves more welcoming communities for newcomers and provide access to people and connections to ease integration.

Our survey found that companies generally claim to be open to recruiting people from different backgrounds and cultures and are positively inclined towards building international workforces. Yet, employers face numerous barriers hindering them from hiring talent from abroad. Long processing times for work permits, language obstacles, and cultural challenges top the list.

Companies need to increase their focus on integration, inclusive language training, and career development opportunities. Many companies, in fact, lack know-how on working with international skills. Illustrating this point, while many responding

companies deemed local language proficiency as unimportant in theory, in practice international talent often need these skills, especially if English is not used as the common language in the workplace.

Can we start here?

The labour market is a 'war' for talent, placing sought-after individuals in the driver's seat in putting forward their demands to employers and locales. The talents indeed may have already won: They get to decide what they want, as they are highly sought after by places and employers alike.

The organisations across Europe that we work with increasingly agree: Let's share talent by aligning labour market supply and demand collaboratively where we can. The intra-EU referral of talent, in this regard, is important, and boasts untapped potential, as does building partnerships across the globe. Talent Bridge Africa, to this end, is a promising initiative attracting strong local interest in Europe and Africa behind a win-win partnership. The goal is to match surplus of talent in Africa in certain industries with local demand in Europe, where the so-called bridge symbolises a 'two-way street' of economic benefit for both regions either by knowledge transfer, upskilling, or direct financial benefits.

It is also evident from our data that, as important as economic development is perceived by governments, it is striking that only half of our surveyed countries have a national strategy in place for international talent attraction and retention. That is another area to start.

Can we get back to the future?

The discussion among the pioneers and experts at the European Talent Mobility Forum centred

around this quandary: Why is it that, after a decade in the industry of global talent attraction, we are still discussing the same topics? Where is the innovation, where are the solutions, and how can we embark on a future-oriented path if we keep taking one step back instead of two steps forward?

In conclusion - Just do it

Though this commentary opened on a dour note, we know what we need to do and the policies that must be put in place. Collaborative platforms have been established, with much happening at the EU, national, regional, and city levels. It is far past time to get to work fixing migration pathways, branding ourselves to target groups, offering the right soft-landing support, and better including migrants in our societies so they can live the life they want. At the risk of sounding like an old commercial: Just do it.

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Africa-to-Europe value chains: How nearshoring can mitigate Europe's migration crisis and aid energy transition



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Africa-to-Europe value chains in manufacturing and agri-food production can mitigate factors driving current migration patterns by employing Africans in local value-added production and boosting African GDP growth, reorienting Africa-Europe relations towards mutual economic benefit and dignity.

As global supply chains continue to unwind, Europe will become more economically bound with North Africa and adjacent regions in Sub-Saharan Africa. How this economic relationship is managed will significantly impact the scale and manner of African migration to Europe. By 2030, 42% of the world's young people will live in Africa, making the continent home to the largest supply of available labour globally. This resource, as well as inexpensive land and energy, is spurring the relocation of manufacturing and agri-food production to Africa to service European end-markets. Buoyed by conducive business conditions, the shift has occurred especially in North Africa (primarily Morocco), as well as a handful of countries across sub-Saharan Africa. This 'nearshoring' also holds the potential to markedly reduce African migration to Europe.

Africa's super-abundance of renewable energy means that nearshoring could also accelerate the global energy transition, where manufacturing and agri-food production in Africa is cost-effectively powered by locally produced green energy. Africa-to-Europe manufacturing value chains that employ Africans locally in value-added production can reset Euro-Africa relations by promoting win-win cooperation, contributing to African GDP growth, and mitigating many of the drivers driving current migration patterns. In parallel with implementing important measures discussed at the Vienna Migration Conference (VMC) 2023, therefore, European migration policy should aim to better facilitate and coordinate the creation of Africa-to-Europe value chains.

Africa-to-Europe manufacturing value chains can address migration drivers

The transformative promise of establishing Africa-to-Europe value chains is illustrated by Morocco's rapidly growing automotive manufacturing ecosystem. As the centrepiece of Morocco's embryonic Africa-to-Europe economic corridor, the automotive industry now accounts for about 25% of the Kingdom's GDP and employs one-quarter of a million Moroccans. The sector produces more than 700,000 vehicles every year, a figure slated to reach more than 1 million by 2025, with at least a quarter of these to be electric vehicles.

The rise of Morocco's automotive sector has been facilitated by Rabat's development of high-speed, high-volume capacity transportation combined with a business-sensitive posture and its Industrial Acceleration Plan. This favourable business climate encouraged the European automakers Groupe Renault and Groupe PSA (now part of the Stellantis conglomerate) to open manufacturing plants in the country. These factories, in turn, are now anchoring around 250 international firms from the United States, Europe, Japan, China, and elsewhere, each operating their own local manufacturing plants to supply automotive components.

Among the several German firms participating in Morocco's automotive manufacturing ecosystem, Leoni, a global leader in manufacturing automotive wiring systems, has invested over €60 million in

Morocco to create ten production sites that employ around 17,400 Moroccans. Italian automotive companies, meanwhile, constitute about 10% of firms operating in Morocco's automotive sector. The robust ecosystem has also prompted Chinese enterprises to integrate into this Morocco-European-led value chain. For example, CITIC Dicastal, the global leader in aluminium cast parts, built a \$400 million plant that can produce 6 million pieces annually to supply Peugeot and two additional manufacturing facilities in Morocco. As a result of Chinese integration into the value chain, Europe's two best-selling car models – the Peugeot 208 and Renault's Dacia Sandero – are now produced in Morocco with Chinese components, also made in Morocco.

Automotive manufacturing is also a budding industry across Sub-Saharan Africa, described by Bloomberg News as the “last frontier for car makers on the hunt for growth.” Nigeria alone has a driving-age population of over 99 million. In 2019, meanwhile, Nigeria imported 1.3 million vehicles, while assembling only 14,000 locally. Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean automakers have established automotive plants in Sub-Saharan Africa, with Volkswagen leading the way among European carmakers. The German automaker is launching its e-Golf model, the first Volkswagen electric car produced in Africa, at its \$20 million automobile assembly plant in Rwanda. As the former chair of Volkswagen's Africa division explained, the company is eyeing a pan-African end-market: “the big game will be to connect ... Kenya, Rwanda, Nigeria, South Africa and create an African market. Because then you [are] talking a billion people.”

By 2025, Africa will boast over 100 cities with more than a million inhabitants – one third more than the

EU. Türkiye's efforts to establish commercial architecture in the central Maghreb and West Africa indeed underscores the competition to capture this expanding African market share. Türkiye has, for instance, established itself as Algeria's largest foreign employer through the development of steel manufacturing facilities and Africa's largest textile production plant.

In Senegal, Türkiye opened a steel plant and a furniture factory, which will satisfy growing consumer demand for sofa beds and other furniture in West Africa's burgeoning urban population centres. The investments are also expected to bolster the competitive advantage of Türkiye's furniture exporters, to the detriment of Poland, Germany, Italy, and the Czech Republic, which currently all export more furniture than Türkiye. Better servicing of Africa's rapidly expanding urban markets with affordable consumer items can, furthermore, help ease migration pull factors.

China is similarly developing a manufacturing base in Egypt through the appliance manufacturing sector, with Chinese home appliance giant Haier's newly constructed Egyptian manufacturing complex slated to begin producing televisions, washing machines, and air conditioners in 2024. With additional planned production lines for refrigerators and freezers, Haier expects to produce 1 million home appliances per year in Egypt for sale in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

Africa-to-Europe agri-food production value chains can reduce forced migration

The geopolitical future of African migration to Europe, in large measure, depends on the state of agri-food

production in Africa. Agriculture currently accounts for 30% of Africa's GDP and 55% of the continent's workforce. Home to most of the world's uncultivated arable land, vast untapped energy resources, and the world's fastest growing workforce, the relocation of agri-food production to Africa will not only help better feed the continent and prevent famine-driven migration, but will become an increasingly vital component of European food security. Again, Morocco is the trailblazing exemplar. In parallel with the establishment of its automotive manufacturing ecosystem, Morocco has been developing high value-added, agri-food production value chains. Through its 2010-2020 Green Morocco Plan (Plan Maroc Vert), Rabat overhauled Morocco's agriculture sector, reorienting it towards higher value exports. By 2020, the value of Morocco's agricultural exports rose by 117% to roughly \$3.5 billion, creating 342,000 new jobs.

Rabat's 10-year successor plan, Green Generation 2020-2030, is focused on enhancing the resilience and sustainability of the country's agricultural production through green energy and climate-smart, agri-tech to raise the value of exports and bolster domestic food security through greater self-sufficiency. In 2021, Morocco was the world's fourth largest tomato exporter, expanding in key markets in Europe, and in 2022, virtually tied for third with Spain. Meanwhile, in 2021, Morocco became the United Kingdom's second largest supplier of tomatoes, with the UK reducing its tomato purchases from Spain by about 24% while tomato imports from Morocco rose by almost 34%. A similar phenomenon occurred with Moroccan tomato, citrus, and berry exports across various EU countries. Water is the primary limiting factor on Morocco's agricultural output – Rabat is, therefore, now engaged in an ambitious infrastructure build-out to construct sufficient

water desalination facilities powered by the country's abundant solar and wind energy resources.

Similar agricultural modernisation efforts are underway in Nigeria, Ethiopia, and elsewhere across sub-Saharan Africa – many to be powered by Africa's substantial renewable energy resources in the near future. The ten countries of North Africa and the Sahel region situated in the Sahara Desert possess the world's largest solar resources – this combined solar energy is 7,000 times greater than the power requirements of the EU at any given moment. Likewise, the Namib Desert, stretching across southwestern Africa's entire coastline, receives solar irradiation close to Saharan levels. Africa's enormous solar resources are supplemented by vast wind power resources. For example, Namibia's wind power capacity factor is over 50% greater than Australia's.

In addition to being able to power water desalination and irrigation through renewable energy, Africa has the potential to produce \$1.06 trillion worth of green hydrogen and its derivative green ammonia by 2035. Africa is already emerging as a global hub for green ammonia production that will supply the manufacture of low-carbon synthetic fertilizers, a gatekeeper requirement for boosting African agricultural production.

Conclusions

As European Commission Vice-President Margaritas Schinas emphasised in his keynote address at VM2023, a comprehensive solution to Europe's migration problems must be grounded in European values that prioritise protecting Europe's borders and saving lives.

To this end, VMC2023's "A new era for labour migration" panel focused on the positive impacts that well-managed labour migration and cross-regional economic cooperation can have in terms of addressing demographic transition in Europe, but also in terms of reducing migration pressures in African countries. This requires a mutual commitment to balanced partnerships and joint agendas but also the readiness to overcome institutional silos within the EU system, Member State bureaucracies, and public and private sector domains. Coordinated approaches towards addressing labour demands across the Union would support these efforts, as would the establishment of cooperative platforms to promote European business investment in manufacturing and agri-food production in Africa.

Africa-to-Europe manufacturing and agri-food production value chains can create jobs for millions of young Africans and free them from the need to take the risk of an irregular and dangerous crossing to Europe. They also hold great potential in aiding the green transition by powering African production from locally produced green energy. Instead of an asymmetrical relationship where Africa serves as a pool of human resources and a reservoir for raw materials and energy to be sent to Europe in exchange for finished consumer products and development aid, Africa-to-Europe value chains can redefine Africa-Europe relations on the basis of mutual economic benefit and dignity. Nearshoring employs Africans locally in value-added production, contributing to African GDP growth. In turn, investment in Africa-to-Europe value chains certainly cannot replace the development of comprehensive and future-oriented labour migration governance in Europe, but it can become an important part of Europe's migration policy set.

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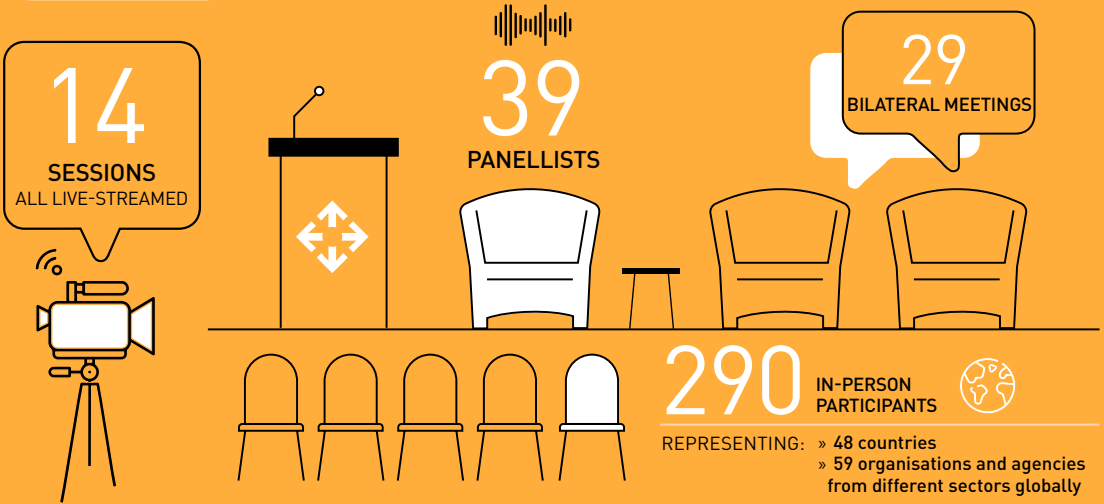
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FIGURES

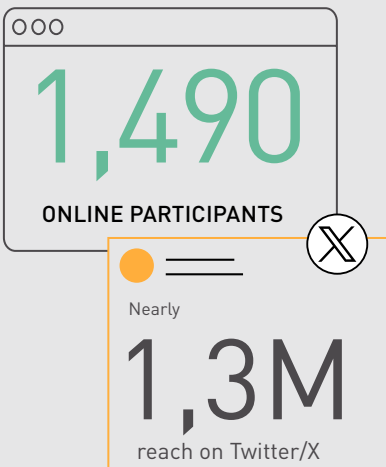


VMC2023 AS A HYBRID EVENT

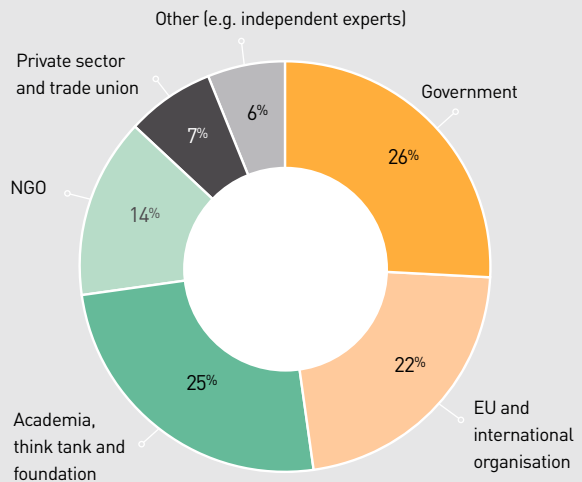
AT THE VENUE



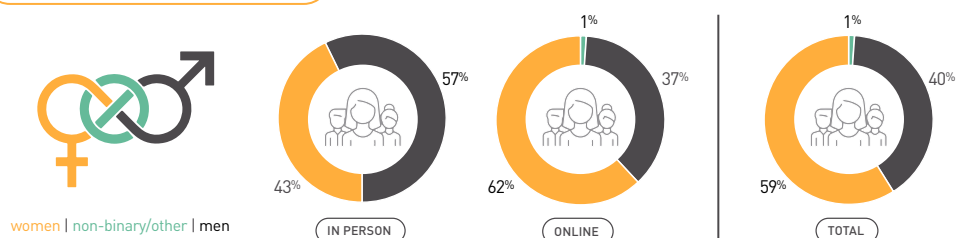
ONLINE



Online participants per sector

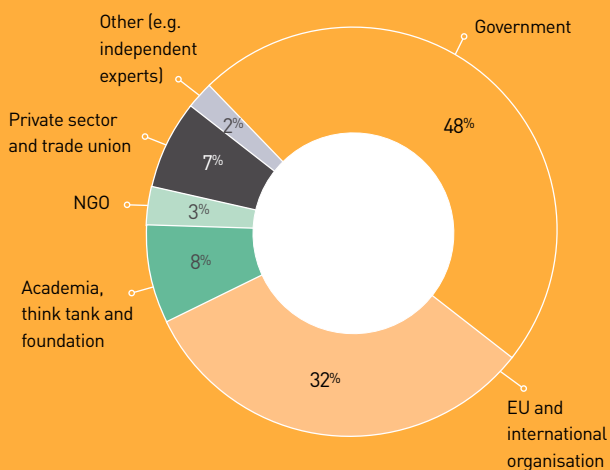


GENDER DISTRIBUTION

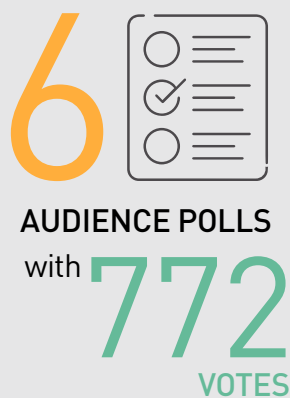


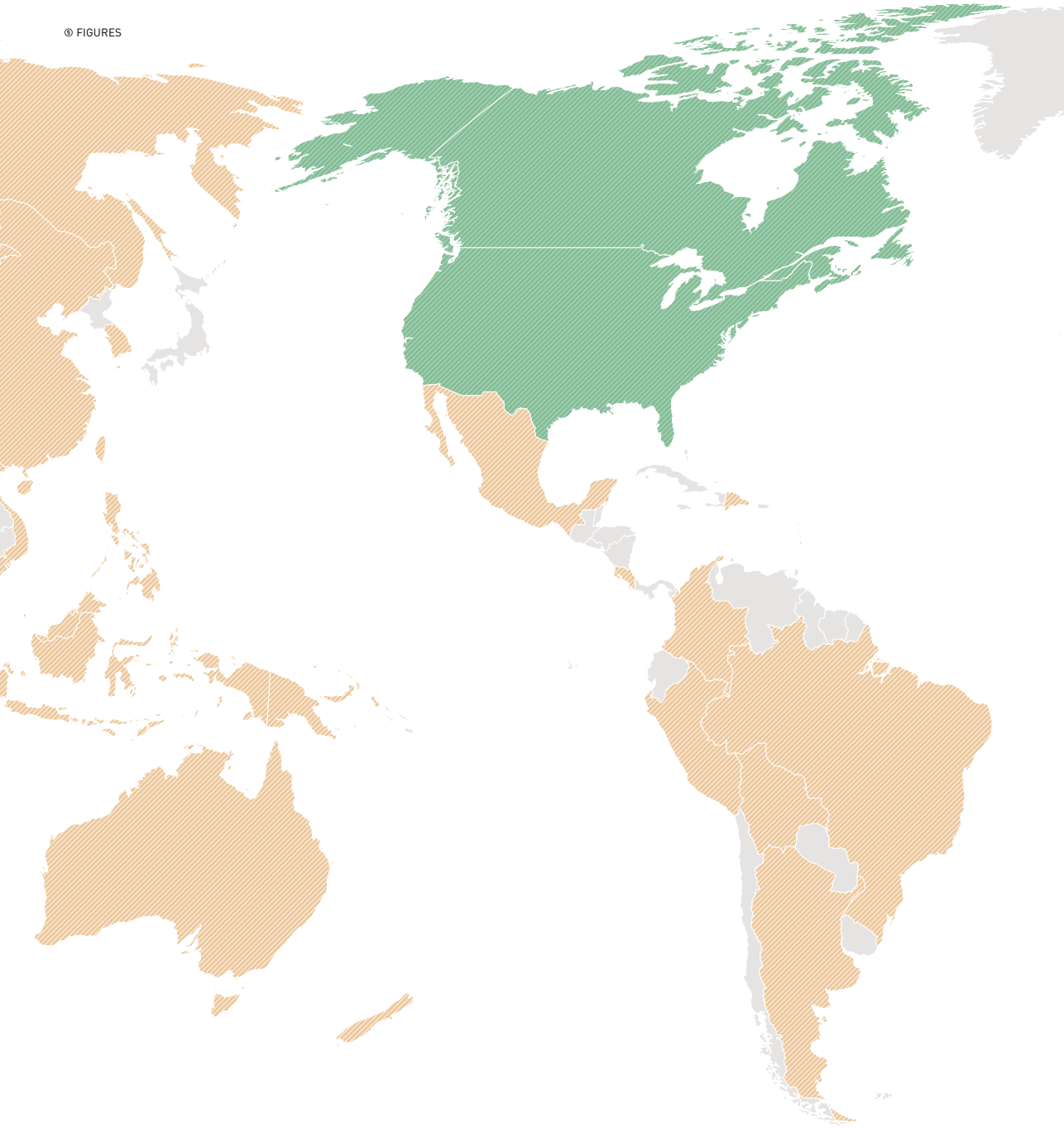
AT THE MIGRATIONS FUTURES DINNER

Dinner participants per sector



EVENT ENGAGEMENT





VMC2023 in-person participants sector overview


161
Government

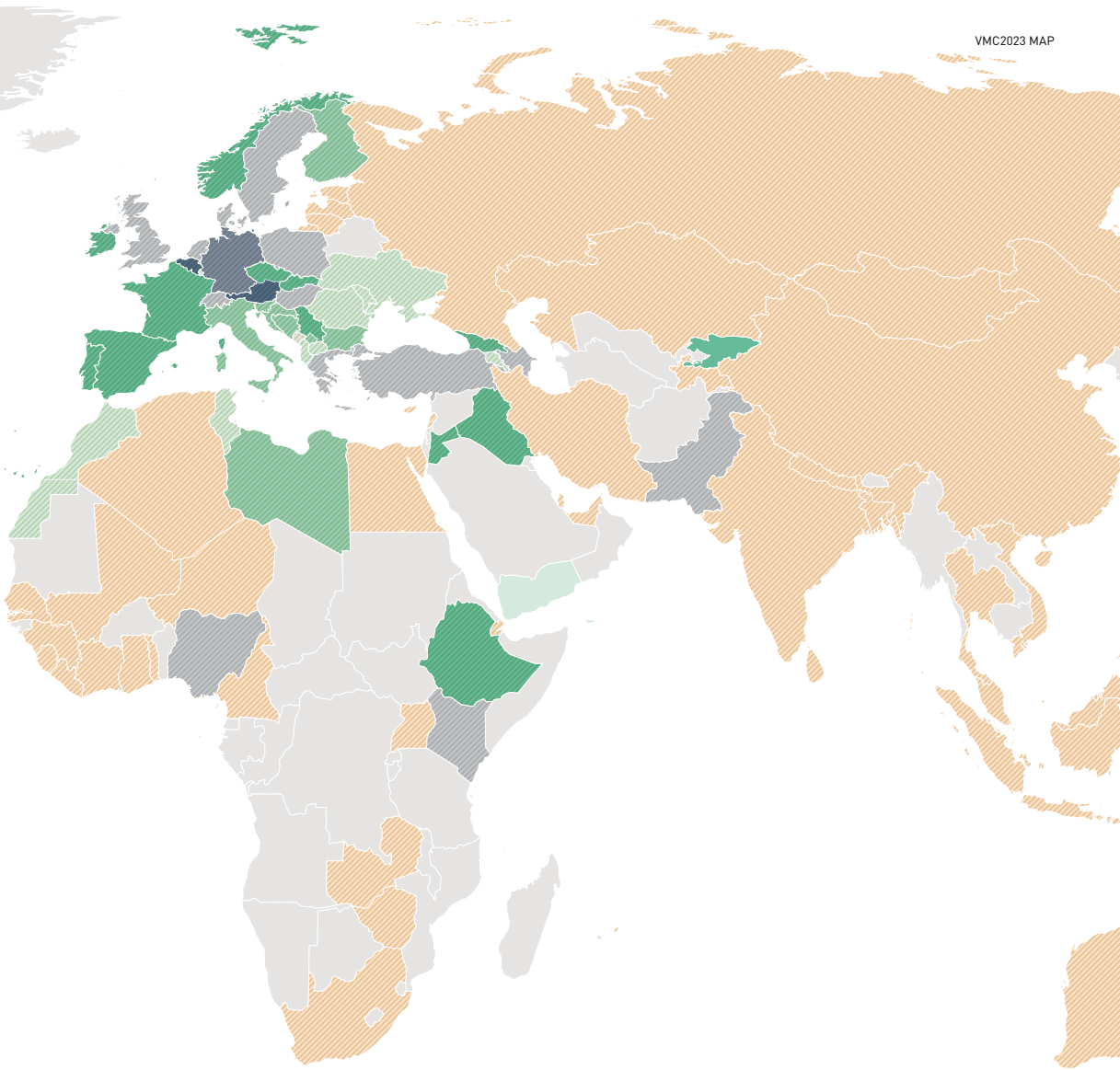

83
EU and international organisation


21
Private sector and trade union


15
Academia, think tank and foundation


7
NGO


3
Other (e.g. independent experts)

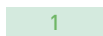


Geographic locations of VMC2023 participants

ONLINE



IN-PERSON



1



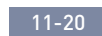
2



3-4



5-10



11-20



≥21

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This report condenses the main highlights of VMC2023; as such, it is not an exhaustive summary of the discussions. The views and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the opinion of ICMPD.

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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 30 years, ICMPD has advised and supported 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.

The Vienna-based organisation has a mission in Brussels, regional offices in Istanbul, Malta and Abuja as well as 28 field and project offices in several countries. ICMPD has nearly 500 staff members and is active in over 90 countries.



20
Members States



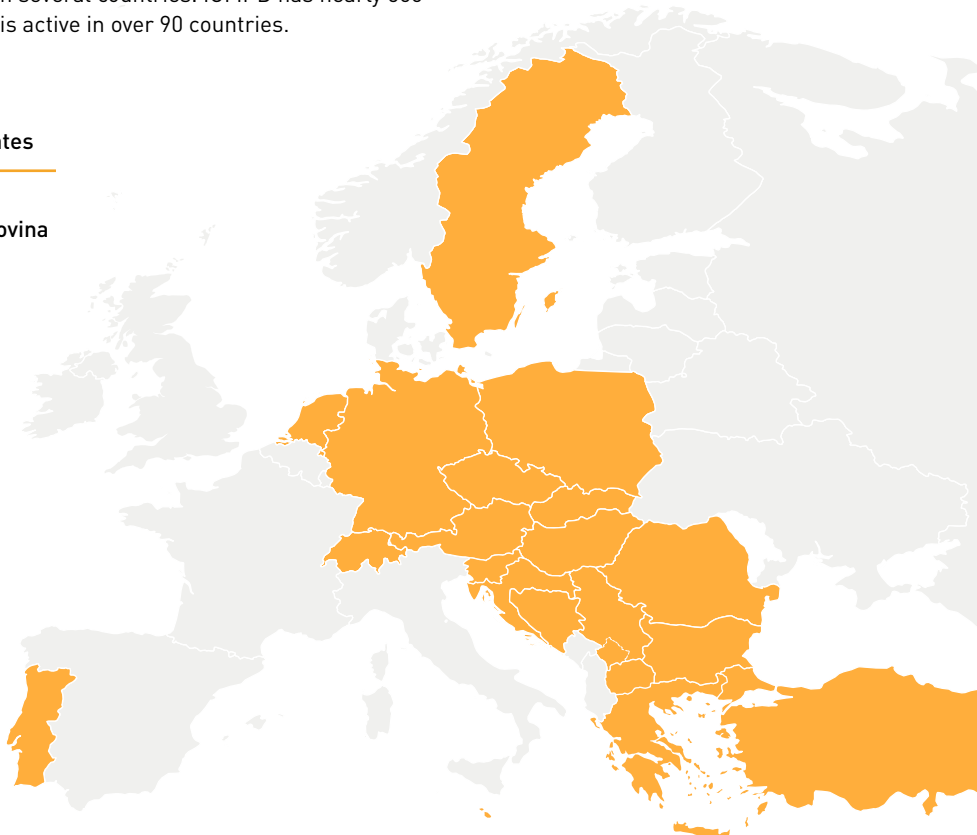
498
Staff members



28
Field and project offices

ICMPD Member States

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



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.



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ICMPD mission statement

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.

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

Every autumn 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, 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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