

Vienna Migration Conference 2023

Closing Remarks

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear chairs and panellists, friends and colleagues,

Like every year, it is my final duty to close the agenda and proceed to the conclusions of the Vienna Migration Conference 2023. I want to keep this short, but I have to admit that this is not an easy task after two days full of excellent discussions and outstanding contributions. All of them deserve to be highlighted; all of them should be remembered; and all of them qualify as guiding principles for our work on better migration governance.

Yesterday, we started the conference with three basic observations. We stated that our migration policies work perhaps better than we tend to think; we agreed that we still have a lot to achieve in view of growing challenges and opportunities; and we concluded that we must become much better in communicating the aims and approaches that we apply.

When reflecting upon the history of the EU pact on migration and asylum, Vice-President Schinas reminded us of “the intellectual appeal of pessimism” that often haunts the debate on migration and makes it difficult to find common ground and joint solutions. In order to overcome this obstacle, he said, all sides must be receptive to each other, must be concrete on what they need, and clear on what they are willing to do for their partners. When they manage to accomplish all of this, they can be quite optimistic about progress in dialogue and delivery.

Against this backdrop, allow me to focus on a few aspects that we heard yesterday and today. I think that they represent the spirit of the conference; but also confirm that there is reason for optimism, even in difficult and challenging times.

- We have learned that the concept of migration partnerships, that was a novel concept a few years ago, has developed into a common feature and widely used tool in international cooperation on migration.

- In this regard, we have heard that there is sufficient progress to upscale the existing partnership platforms into permanent institutions and structures, that apply similar approaches in similar contexts and always involve the private sector and civil society.
- We have discussed the need to build a global system of organised labour migration that works across all regions and serves the needs and interests of all sides involved. Today 30 million jobs cannot be filled on a global scale, which costs the world's economy the staggering amount of one trillion US dollars. Openings are there, but private sector representatives told us that they still face a lot of red tape when trying to recruit from abroad. It may still take half a year or more to issue a visa or permit, even when all formal requirements are fulfilled. I think we can do better than that, and I think we can find ways to do better than that.
- But we cannot do this work without enhancing the consent and support of our citizens. In this regard, we have heard that we need to find the concrete arguments to recalibrate the discourse. We have to be clearer on what a lack of legal and orderly migration might entail for our economies and welfare systems.
- Last but not least, it was reassuring to hear that there is still a clear commitment towards persons in need of international protection. Global displacement is on the rise, and it is our obligation to work towards better solutions for the most vulnerable groups among us. We must seek for new solutions, we know that, but we must never lose sight of our joint responsibility, and we must ensure that human compassion remains the central pillar of our protection policies.

I do not want to take more time now. But I want to assure you that none of the contributions made at this conference will be lost. Like for previous editions of the VMC, we will compile them in a conference report and share the report with you.

All that is left for me now is to thank once more our hosts and supporters, the Organisation for Refugee Services – ORS – and the City of Vienna. I want to thank all our presenters, panellists and discussants for sharing their know-how and insights with us. And last but not least, I want to thank all of my ICMPD colleagues who made this event possible: our Deputy Director General Lukas Gehrke and our Head of Policy Malin Frankenhaeuser, as the leaders of the organisation of the VMC, and of course all the other members of the team that worked day and night to make all of this happen.

On this note I want to end – to those who still have to travel today, I wish you a safe journey; to those who stay on, enjoy the city of Vienna; to all of you, have a nice afternoon and evening and thank you very much. I hope that you will enjoy the lunch that concludes the conference and hope to see all of you again at the Vienna Migration Conference 2024.

Thank you.