

Vienna Migration Conference 2023

Conference Opening, Director General

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Vienna, 10 October 2023

Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues

Let me welcome all of you to Palais Niederösterreich and the 2023 Vienna Migration Conference. It is a great pleasure to have you here today but also to have so many of you joining us online.

These are sad days, as we are still under the impression of the terrible events that took place over the weekend. Our thoughts and condolences are with the victims of the horrific attacks, their families and friends. Violence and war are on the rise in our world, with increasing impact and velocity. Also, the world of migration moves faster with every year that passes. Migration experts and policy makers have to move faster too; to keep on track with the developments and prepare for the difficult decisions ahead of them.

On a global scale, we are faced with the largest levels of displacement since the end of World War II. In Europe we record the highest numbers of asylum seekers and irregular arrivals since 2016. On a daily basis, we experience the effects of growing political instability, rising living costs and natural disasters linked to climate change. We experience the effects of the war in Ukraine and of the worsening situation in many other crisis regions. We also experience the effects of demographic change, technological transformation and imbalances on our labour markets. But we also see that the will for cooperation across borders and regions becomes deeper every year, that partnerships on migration become stronger, and that new and innovative ideas show that a better and less contested future on migration governance is possible.

Discussing the future is the main task of a conference like the VMC. But before we do that, allow me to say a few words about the past. ICMPD has turned thirty this year, and we had a lot of opportunity to look back upon our own history, and the history of international migration policy, together with many of the friends and partners that have joined us along the way. And this review led us to three main conclusions.

The first conclusion was that our migration policies are in a much better state than we often tend to think, when we read the news or observe the comments and debates on social media. Our understanding of migration, our tools and instruments, the intensity of regional and cross-regional cooperation and the quality of partnership have reached levels nobody could have imagined thirty years ago.

But, and that was the second conclusion, we do not always see that progress. We do not see it because the challenges seem to become bigger, and events seem to develop faster. We should not forget about our achievements. Because they give us the confidence we need to address the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Our third conclusion was less positive. 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.

Migration is complex and highly contested. There are different realities, different perceptions, different interests and different positions on migration. Migration brings us together, but often it also drives us apart. It is my strong conviction that the best solutions are always the ones that bring us together, that are based on a shared understanding, on joint aims, and on a spirit of respect and partnership. Nobody can succeed by going alone, nobody can succeed when not respecting the needs and realities of the others, and nobody can succeed without getting the message across to the public, the media and the people.

It is these essential requirements towards migration policy and migration diplomacy that we want to discuss during the next day and a half. I think that the VMC provides a unique opportunity for doing exactly that. Thanks to all of you, who engage with us, the VMC has developed into one of the most important international platforms for high-level discussions on migration in Europe and beyond. It is good to welcome so many of you here again today. Like every year we want to emphasise open, inclusive and frank discussions. And we want to provide space for networking, personal meetings and informal exchanges.

To this end, I have the honour to welcome a set of outstanding speakers today and tomorrow. Thank you for joining us here in Vienna, and I invite and encourage everyone to join the debate here in this impressive hall. I very much look forward to our discussions.

Last but not least, I am very grateful that also this year a number of institutions are supporting us to organise this event. I would like to sincerely thank ORS – the Organisation for Refugee Services and the City of Vienna. Your support has been crucial for the successful organisation of this conference.

And now I have the honour and special pleasure to welcome Her Excellency Susanne Raab, Federal Minister for Women, Family, Integration and Media of Austria, who will share with us her views on the key aspects and the key priorities of the migration policy agenda. Minister Raab will be followed by His Excellency Atilla Toros, President of the Presidency of Migration Management of the Republic of Türkiye to open the conference on behalf of current chair of the ICMPD Steering Group.

Ladies and gentlemen, I sincerely hope that you will enjoy the 2023 edition of the Vienna Migration Conference. Now it is my pleasure to hand over to Minister Raab.