

Vienna Migration Conference 2024

Conference Opening, Director General

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Vienna, 22 October 2024

Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

Let me welcome all of you to Palais Liechtenstein and the 2024 Vienna Migration Conference. It is a great pleasure to have you here today but also to see so many of you joining us online.

Let me start with an obvious fact. Dealing with migration continues to be a challenge and the migration debate continues to attract a high degree of public and political attention. In this respect, this year's VMC is no exception. Nonetheless, since we gathered a year ago in this beautiful room, we have seen a number of developments that make the current phase of migration governance stand out, and will hopefully make VMC 2024 a special event as well.

First of all, we have to note that the trends towards increasing levels of global displacement continued also last year. More people than ever before were forced to flee their homes due to war, instability, and economic hardship. According to UNHCR, there are more than 120 million people displaced at the moment, within their own countries or across international borders. The urgency to find functioning solutions for these people, as well as for the countries that host them, has never been greater. We must work to ensure that they are not forced to resort to irregular migration routes in search of a safe and secure place. And given the escalating crises in Gaza, the Middle East, and many regions in sub-Saharan Africa, we have to assume that the task ahead is only growing bigger.

At the same time, 2024 has seen remarkable number of new migration policies being developed and tested. New agreements and migration partnerships have been formed across regional and continental lines, aiming to reduce irregular migration while also promoting new channels for legal and labour migration. New models of the external processing of asylum claims have been discussed and developed. Some of them were finally rejected, some of them are in the initial phase of implementation. Their lessons learned, both positive and less positive, will have a lasting impact on the course of European and global migration policy. Finally, the adoption of the new Pact provides a fundamentally revised framework for governing migration and asylum in the context of the European Union.

And while we still reflect on the outcomes of key elections and other major events in Europe and other parts of the world, we also look ahead to significant political milestones, such as the inauguration of the new European Commission and the upcoming US presidential elections,

events that will have far-reaching implications for the geopolitical debate but also for the debate on migration.

And when we analyse the central issues of this debate, the focus of recent political campaigns and at the outcomes of recent elections, there is one clear takeaway: Many of our citizens are not satisfied with the current state of migration and with the results that migration policies have achieved up to this point, regardless of whether we agree with this assessment or not.

The task before us is evident. Citizens and voters call for a reduction in irregular migration, for functioning integration, for responses to security concerns and for sensible labour migration policies. They call for functioning healthcare, for affordable housing and for high-quality education systems, policy areas that are closely linked to migration as well. But they also call for migration policies that guarantee the protection of human rights and policies that build upon strong and trustful partnerships between all countries that are linked by international migration.

Trying to meet all these expectations at the same time will often feel like squaring the circle, like a mission that is close to the impossible. Fortunately, last year's developments have also laid a stronger foundation for achieving even the most ambitious goals. The agreement on the Migration Pact, after years of difficult negotiations, is one such breakthrough that sends an important message to European citizens and global partners alike: The EU remains capable of taking decisive action and of reaching agreements as a united entity.

In politics, there is, however, rarely time for prolonged celebration. History moves forward, and every achievement is basically a stepping stone, a foundation for future progress. The Vienna Migration Conference remains committed to contributing to this ever-repeating task. As in previous years, we will take stock of the current state of affairs, reflect on the progress made over the past year, and then look ahead in an open and frank conversation at the challenges that remain and the best ways to address them.

Our goal is to discuss a wide array of topics, from the geopolitical factors shaping today's migration policies to new approaches in the area of international protection, strategies for recruiting skilled workers and the potential and hopefully promising requirements to take migration cooperation to a next and better level.

We aim to be realistic, solution-focused, and grounded in facts, and as always, pay specific attention to fostering cooperation across regions and continents. And I am very confident that with our outstanding lineup of speakers, we are more than prepared to achieve this aim. We will gain fresh insights, learn from diverse perspectives, and generate forward-thinking ideas. I thank you all for joining us here in Vienna, and I encourage everyone to actively engage in our discussion.

Lastly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the institutions that have helped us to organise this event. A special thank you goes to ORS - the Organisation for Refugee Services, the City of Vienna and Fragomen Global for their crucial support in making this conference possible.

Now, it is my distinct pleasure to hand the floor to my colleague, Malin Frankenhaeuser, who, together with her team, is responsible for organizing the VMC. Malin will introduce the conference programme and the keynote discussion that will set the stage for our upcoming conversations.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you again for joining us today and tomorrow. I sincerely hope that you will enjoy the 2024 edition of the Vienna Migration Conference. It is now my pleasure to hand over the stage, Malin, the floor is yours.

Thank you.