ICMPD
International Centre for
Migration Policy Development

The value of Regional Migration Dialogues in times of global change

HOW THE BUDAPEST, PRAGUE, RABAT, AND THE KHARTOUM PROCESSES SUPPORT COOPERATION ALONG MIGRATION ROUTES

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Executive Summary

Effective migration governance requires cooperation across borders and along entire routes, bringing together countries of origin, transit, and destination. Yet forging such cooperation through binding multilateral frameworks has often proved elusive. Meanwhile, bilateral arrangements cannot fill the gap on their own: they focus on individual relationships, while the drivers, dynamics, and impacts of migration cut across multiple countries and regions.

In this context, Regional Migration Dialogues have emerged as a pragmatic response. Designed as informal, non-binding platforms for policy exchange, coordination, and cooperation, they allow states to engage on politically sensitive issues without the constraints of formal negotiation. This paper examines the four Dialogues facilitated by ICMPD – the Budapest, Prague, Rabat, and Khartoum Processes – which have developed over decades into important elements of the migration governance landscape.

Drawing on more than 30 years of continuous cooperation, the paper underlines that support to the Dialogues is best understood not simply as support for meetings, but as an investment in governance infrastructure that does far more than just convening. Their strategic value lies in five areas: whole-of-route cooperation, a politically usable space for dialogue, reduced transaction costs of diplomacy, avenues from dialogue to implementation, and a Secretariat function - performed by ICMPD - that links political exchange with technical and operational follow-up.

This infrastructure rests on continuity. Together, the four Dialogues span major migration routes linked to Europe, keeping countries of origin, transit, and destination in sustained contact. They have built networks and institutional memory that give governments access to counterparts who might otherwise be hard to reach. Their informal character keeps these channels open even when broader relations deteriorate, and lets them adapt when routes, priorities, and crises change.

Continuity, in turn, enables value to accumulate. Repeated convening, peer-to-peer learning, and agenda co-development foster the trust and shared understanding that deeper technical cooperation depends on. Within individual Dialogues, this sustained engagement has translated into concrete operational outcomes, including Migrant Resource Centres (Budapest), Ukrainian Consultation Centres (Prague), the Network of National Focal Points for Missing Migrants (Rabat), and the Better Migration Management Programme (Khartoum).

Built up over time, this infrastructure is not easily substitutable. Without it, cooperation along migration routes would risk becoming far more fragmented and trust could erode, placing a heavier burden on bilateral channels and leaving fewer spaces in which the most difficult and sensitive issues can be raised.

The task now is to help the Dialogues work even more effectively, recognising they are most impactful when the exchange of ideas, technical cooperation, funding, and implementation reinforce one another, so that jointly identified priorities are

carried into route-based implementation rather than stand-alone interventions. Predictable funding is essential to this, both to preserve the continuity, access, and institutional memory that underpin the Dialogues, and to make the pathway from dialogue to action work consistently.

1. Regional Migration Dialogues in context

Migration is one of the defining policy issues of our time, shaping economies and societies in countries of origin, transit, and destination. While migration requires cooperation across borders, national priorities, policy approaches, and institutional capacities vary considerably. At the same time, the political sensitivity of migration at the domestic level can make it difficult for states to commit to binding multilateral frameworks, particularly where national interests and regional contexts differ. Migration governance has consequently developed through a diverse set of global, regional, and bilateral frameworks and arrangements, providing different avenues for cooperation across different dimensions of migration.

Global coordination on migration governance has nonetheless gained ground in recent years, most notably through the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees. These developments provide important frameworks for international cooperation, but do not constitute a single overarching framework for migration governance. Instead, different international instruments address specific dimensions of mobility. In the field of international refugee protection, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol remain central elements of the international legal framework, alongside the mandate and work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)[1].

Within this broader landscape, Regional Migration Dialogues provide one of several mechanisms through which states can pursue cooperation on migration. They complement formal channels by offering regular and relatively flexible settings for exchange among countries of origin, transit, and destination. Their informal and state-led character supports sustained engagement on issues where national priorities may differ and where formal negotiating processes may not always provide sufficient space for continued exchange.

[1] Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, July 28, 1951, 189 U.N.T.S. 137. Betts, A., Bloom, L., & Omata, N. (2012). Humanitarian innovation and refugee protection (RSC Working Paper No. 85). Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford.

The contribution of Regional Migration Dialogues extends beyond the meetings themselves. Over time, they can help maintain networks among counterparts, support institutional continuity, develop shared understandings of migration challenges and priorities, and create opportunities for technical cooperation and follow-up. In some cases, dialogue can also provide a basis for more practical forms of cooperation. For the EU, participating states and partner countries, engagement in these Dialogues can therefore be understood as one component of a broader investment in regional and interregional migration cooperation.

This paper focuses on four Regional Migration Dialogues facilitated by ICMPD – the Budapest, Prague, Rabat, and Khartoum Processes – and examines the contribution they make within this wider cooperation architecture. It considers five interrelated functions: whole-of-route cooperation, politically usable spaces for dialogue, reduced transaction costs of diplomacy, pathways from dialogue to implementation, and a Secretariat function – performed by ICMPD – that connects political exchange with technical expertise and operational follow-up.

1.1 REGIONAL MIGRATION DIALOGUES: HISTORY AND CHARACTERISTICS

The Regional Migration Dialogues emerged in the absence of a comprehensive migration governance framework. First developed in Europe in the mid-1980s, they subsequently spread to other regions as state-led, non-binding forums for exchange, coordination, and cooperation across borders.[2] Their proliferation reflected a growing recognition that migration challenges could rarely be addressed effectively by states acting alone.

Flexibility is a signature strength, letting countries engage on politically sensitive issues without the constraints of formal negotiation. By design, they are:

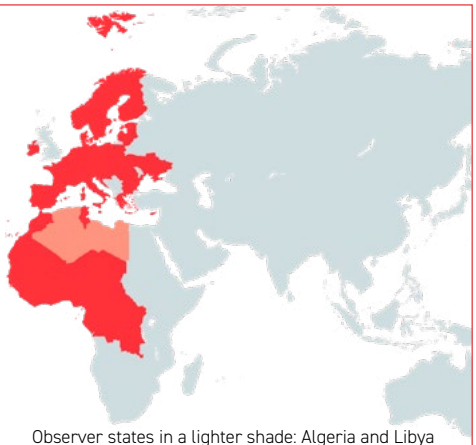
- **State-led forums** for information-sharing, policy exchange, and coordination on specific migration issues;
- **Non-binding and informal,** bringing states together with a diverse range of stakeholders, including international organisations and experts;
- **Adaptive,** having emerged in response to fragmented governance structures, political caution, and the practical need for cross-border and cross-regional solutions.

The Budapest, Prague, Rabat, and Khartoum Processes – the focus of this paper – together link European countries with partner countries across the eastern and south-eastern neighbourhoods, Asia, and Africa, forming an important part of the EU's external dimension on migration. They are primarily funded by the European Commission, with the Budapest and Prague Processes also receiving bilateral contributions from state donors.

[2] Lebon-McGregor, E. (2020).

Rabat Process

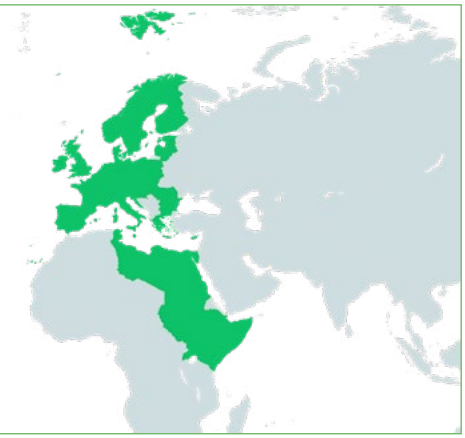
Launched in 2006 as the Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development, the Rabat Process brings together 57 partner countries from Europe and from North, West, and Central Africa, alongside key partners including the EU and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as well as international organisations with permanent observer status. Its current multi-annual cooperation framework is defined by the **Cádiz Political Declaration and Action Plan 2023–2027.**



Observer states in a lighter shade: Algeria and Libya

Khartoum Process

Launched in 2014 and also known as EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative, the Khartoum Process is the newest of the EU-Africa Regional Migration Dialogues. Its participants include 40 states, EU and African Union (AU) institutions, and partner organisations. Its current framework is set out in the **Cairo Political Declaration** and **2025 Cairo Action Plan.**

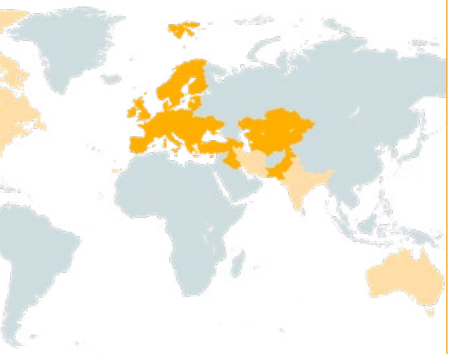


Prague Process

Established in 2009, the Prague Process has built its strength in evidence generation, peer learning, policy convergence, and institutional capacity building, particularly through its Migration Observatory and Training Academy. It comprises 47 participating states across the European Union, the Schengen area, the Eastern Partnership, the Western Balkans, and Central Asia, as well as Türkiye. Its strategic direction is charted in the 2022 **Ministerial Declaration** and the **Action Plan 2023–2027.**

Budapest Process

Established in 1993, the Budapest Process is one of the longest-standing intergovernmental dialogues on migration. It brings together 52 governments, 14 international organisations, and seven observer states, covering South-East Europe and the East, with an emphasis on South Asia and the Middle East (Silk Routes). Its current strategic framework is spelled out in the **2024 Ministerial Declaration** and the accompanying **Call for Action 2025–2030.**



Observer states in a lighter shade: Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Iran, India, and United States

2. Regional Migration Dialogues and their evolution

Over time, the four Dialogues have evolved beyond periodic exchanges into structured forms of cooperation, with standing governance arrangements that provide continuity between ministerial cycles, link political oversight to technical and operational follow-up, and widen ownership among participating states. Together with their enduring flexibility and capacity to adapt, these features have helped sustain the relevance of the Dialogues and deepen the engagement of states and organisations.

2.1 MULTILAYERED GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE

Regional Migration Dialogues started out as consultative platforms but have since evolved into structured governance architectures, with strong mechanisms for carrying decisions forward between meetings, supporting implementation, and tracking progress. They now function not only as forums for consultation but as governance-support mechanisms that link political direction, technical cooperation, and operational follow-up.

The Budapest Process, the oldest of the four, illustrates this shift. It began as a ministerial conference with comparatively ad hoc follow-up arrangements.[3]

[3] International Centre for Migration Policy Development. (2023). Catalogue of activities 1993–2023: Budapest Process. Budapest Process.

However, it has since developed more layered structures and distributed leadership across participating states. While its state-led character remains central, its governance arrangements and formats have become more open and participatory. The same pattern can be seen across the other three Dialogues.

Although institutional design differs, all four have developed layered governance architectures combining political leadership, ministerial and senior-official oversight, thematic and expert-level exchange, national contact point networks, knowledge-support structures, and Secretariat coordination.

This architecture ties high-level political engagement to ongoing technical work, while also allowing issues to travel upwards from expert discussion to political endorsement. Meanwhile, ministerial and senior-level meetings preserve a structured intergovernmental setting in which participating states can engage as peers on an equal footing.

Regional Migration Dialogues' governance architecture

- **Chairmanship:** Provides political direction, visibility, and continuity; helps anchor the Dialogue at the intergovernmental level and represents it externally. The chairmanship is held by states.
- **Ministerial conferences:** Convened periodically at the highest political level, these reaffirm political commitment and define the medium-term strategic direction of cooperation, often through declarations and action plans.
- **Senior Officials' Meetings (SOMs):** Held annually, SOMs serve as the main decision-making forum between ministerial meetings and ensure continuity in oversight.
- **Thematic or expert-level meetings and workshops:** Enable technical experts and practitioners to engage in exchange, peer learning, and issue-specific cooperation several times a year.
- **National focal points:** Connect designated national counterparts and help maintain continuity across states.
- **Knowledge-support structures:** Data, knowledge products, capacity-building tools, training activities, and study visits that strengthen institutional memory, learning, and evidence-informed discussion.
- **Secretariat:** Ensures coordination, follow-up, continuity, and the overall operational functioning of the Dialogue.

As these architectures have taken shape, each Dialogue has added structures tailored to its political and institutional context. Although these arrangements differ in form, they perform similar functions, bolstering continuity between meetings, broadening state involvement in guidance and oversight, and opening clearer pathways from discussion to operational follow-up.

In the Budapest Process, follow-up was reinforced through the creation of the Reference Group in 2021, which helps connect dialogue priorities to concrete implementation opportunities. Since 2017, the Prague Process has been supported by a Strategic Group comprising the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania,

Poland, DG HOME, the current EU Presidency, and the ICMPD Secretariat. Similarly, in the Rabat and Khartoum Processes, the Steering Committee, composed of European and African countries as well as EU and African regional institutions, provides strategic guidance for the Dialogue.

Such mechanisms do more than strengthen follow-up. While all participating states engage on an equal footing, including through Senior Officials' Meetings, smaller steering and strategic structures can help distribute ownership, deepen buy-in, and give participants further opportunities to shape strategic direction and carry agreed priorities forward.

The cumulative effect has been a gradual shift from participation towards active ownership, with states playing a larger role in shaping agendas and engaging substantively in discussions.

2.2 FROM DIALOGUE TO IMPLEMENTATION

Dialogue, agenda-setting, and coordination remain the core functions of the Processes. Increasingly, however, operational implementation is woven into their architecture through projects, technical mechanisms, and operational tools, creating clearer pathways from political exchange to practical follow-up (Figure 1). ICMPD plays a distinctive part here, supporting operationalisation directly by funding and implementing projects. The pattern is visible across all four Dialogues.

Figure 1

- **In the Budapest Process,** projects have been implemented since 2011, marking a turn towards more operational forms of cooperation. Examples include Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) along the Silk Routes and in Central Asia, as well as policy support to Member and Observer States including Iraq, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The Process's evaluation describes it as a dialogue-to-implementation mechanism.
- **In the Prague Process,** operationalisation has advanced through projects and initiatives linked to the Dialogue, including funding via the Migration Partnership Facility. The same approach underpinned the operational response to displacement from Ukraine, notably the establishment of Ukrainian Consultation Centres.
- **In the Rabat and Khartoum Processes,** operationalisation has been reinforced through the wider Migration and Mobility Dialogue Support Programme (MMD) ecosystem, including a Grants Facility supporting implementation-oriented follow-up. This is complemented by concrete operational initiatives linked to the Dialogues, including the Regional Operational Centre in support of the Khartoum Process and AU-Horn of Africa Initiative (ROCK), as well as the Network of National Focal Points for Missing Migrants established in the context of the Rabat Process.

Although operationalisation is not equally developed or fully embedded across all four Dialogues, it has become an increasingly essential part of how they work. It strengthens their capacity to connect political exchange with practical cooperation by opening pathways through which donor support can be aligned with priorities jointly defined by partner countries, participating states, and the EU. In doing so, it enhances cooperation frameworks that have already been politically negotiated and are jointly owned. Its further development will depend on closer alignment between political discussions, funding instruments, and implementation actors.

2.3 ADAPTING TO CHANGE: BROADENING AGENDAS AND MEMBERSHIP

The Dialogues have stayed relevant by adapting to changing migration routes, political priorities, and regional dynamics. This has meant broader participation and wider thematic agendas, as the Dialogues have moved towards more comprehensive, whole-of-route approaches that take also into account the perspectives and priorities of countries of origin and transit, in addition to destination countries.

The Budapest Process has broadened significantly, both thematically and geographically. Over successive ministerial cycles, it expanded eastwards to include partners from the Caucasus and Central Asia, and the inclusion of Silk Routes countries from 2010 onwards reinforced its whole-of-route approach. In parallel, its agenda grew beyond an initially narrow focus on irregular migration to embrace a broader range of migration-related issues, including legal mobility, integration, development, and international protection.

In the Prague Process, thematic broadening was formalised through the 2012–2016 Action Plan, which added asylum and international protection to an agenda already encompassing the prevention of irregular migration, return and

reintegration, legal and labour migration, integration, and migration and development. Following extensive consultations with participating states, the number of provisions across the six thematic areas more than doubled in the Action Plan 2023–2027.

For the Rabat and Khartoum Processes, a significant point of convergence came with the 2015 Valletta Summit and the adoption of the Joint Valletta Action Plan (JVAP). This established a shared Europe-Africa framework built around five domains: development and root causes; legal migration and mobility; protection and asylum; prevention of irregular migration and smuggling and trafficking in human beings; and return, readmission, and reintegration. Development has become particularly prominent, especially in the Rabat Process, where it is embedded in the Dialogue's identity as the Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development.

Today, the four Dialogues converge around several priority clusters, from combating irregular migration to the intersection of migration and development. This convergence reflects synergies across the Dialogues and the co-shaping of agendas by participants with diverse and, at times, competing interests. Their whole-of-route composition, bringing together countries of origin, transit, and destination, has resulted in agendas being shaped by the differing roles, experiences, and policy priorities of participating states. The capacity of the Dialogues to adapt their focus, broaden participation as routes and geopolitical dynamics change, and accommodate diverse interests has helped sustain their relevance and continued participation.

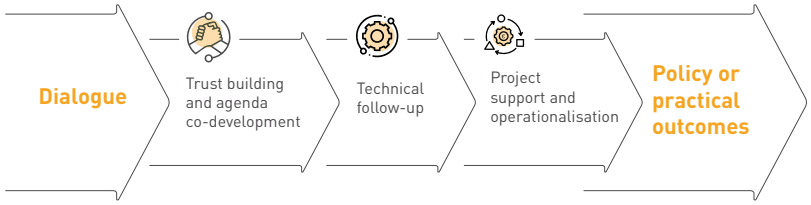
This adaptability remains essential. As migration dynamics evolve, the Dialogues have continued to adjust their agendas in response to emerging priorities: the Prague Process has turned its attention to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the Khartoum Process to climate-induced mobility, and the Rabat Process to sustainable, nationally owned reintegration systems in countries of origin. As routes, roles, and regional dynamics shift, the ability to adapt will remain critical to keeping the Dialogues responsive. Their relevance therefore rests on two complementary functions: the ability to develop agendas jointly and the capacity to respond to changing political realities without losing coherence with their broader frameworks and action plans. In this way, they combine continuity and stability with adaptation, flexibility, and innovation.

3. The value Regional Migration Dialogues generate

Regional Migration Dialogues generate value through the governance functions they perform. They cultivate the relationships, trust, and shared understanding that make cooperation possible among states with diverse and sometimes

competing interests in a highly sensitive and fragmented policy field. Their influence on policy and practice is cumulative, developing through repeated exchange that supports network-building, learning, agenda co-development, and gradual convergence, and which can, in some cases, lead to concrete political and operational outcomes. This "Dialogue Process" can be summarised as follows:

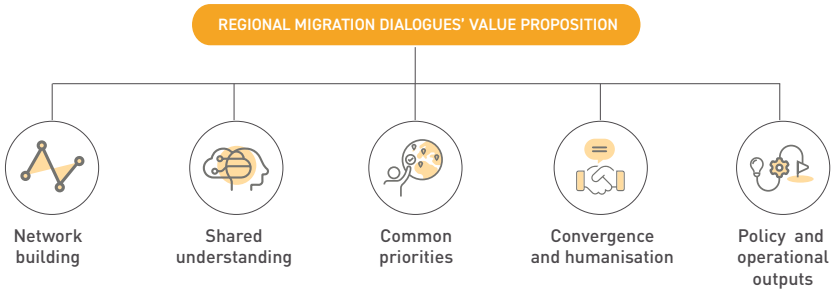
Figure 2



The value generated through this process can be understood across four main dimensions:

- Convening power and continuity
- Learning and evidence
- Trust and shared understanding, co-development, and convergence
- Operational follow-up and results

Figure 3



3.1 CONVENING POWER AND CONTINUITY

The first dimension of this value proposition is the Dialogues' ability to convene relevant actors around regional migration routes and sustain contact over time. ICMPD's Dialogue Secretariats, together with regional and country offices and national contact points, help identify and connect the officials most pertinent to migration policymaking, implementation, and the specific issues under discussion.

This convening function makes cooperation easier in practice. It helps states identify the right counterparts, meet them regularly, and follow up through bilateral or regional channels. For participating states, especially smaller countries, those with few alternative multilateral platforms, or larger states seeking to establish contacts where relations are still thin, the Dialogues provide a time- and cost-effective way to build strategic networks.

Their informal, non-binding character is critical to preserving communication channels even where official relations are strained or cooperation has become politically difficult. In such contexts, the Dialogues offer a space for continued technical engagement, allowing states to stay engaged and benefit from exchange even when other channels have narrowed. Interview evidence suggests that, in some cases, the Dialogues have been among the few settings in which relevant counterparts could remain in contact during periods of political tension.

These networks matter not only for multilateral exchange, but also because they often spill over into bilateral cooperation and sideline meetings.

Where tension runs high, in some cases, the Dialogues remain one of the few viable channels through which EU Member States and partner countries can keep talking, underscoring their value both as platforms for exchange and as mechanisms for maintaining relationships and supporting regional stability.

Participation in the Dialogues has, in this sense, become an important component of participating countries' foreign policy. [4]

3.2 LEARNING AND EVIDENCE-BASED COOPERATION

The Dialogues also support better-informed cooperation. Through training, thematic meetings, exchange visits, data tools, and analytical outputs, they help participants compare practices, build expertise, and retain institutional knowledge despite staff turnover. Their standing structures and accumulated knowledge resources ensure continuity even as individual counterparts change.

[4] Interview with key stakeholder

The participation of international organisations, experts, academics, civil society, the private sector, and other actors in technical meetings and training further reinforces this function by bringing specialised expertise into intergovernmental exchange.

By combining accumulated expertise with recurring inter-state exchange, the Dialogues enable better-informed discussions, foster deeper understandings of one another's migration-related challenges, and can, over time, contribute to greater alignment in practices and responses.

The Prague Process offers a clear example of the institutionalisation of this function through its Migration Observatory and Training Academy, which serves as a vehicle for evidence-informed exchange and capacity building across participating states. Its value lies not only in strengthening technical capacity, but also in raising the quality of cooperation itself.

Eastern Partnership

The Prague Process has played an important role in supporting Eastern Partnership countries as they have developed key elements of their migration systems. It has aided in strengthening institutions, coordination mechanisms, policy frameworks, and data capacities, while supporting improved approaches to the management of migration flows, asylum and refugee responses, and alignment with international standards on protection and reintegration. Its Migration Observatory and Training Academy are specifically identified as distinctive features.

This exchange has not been one-directional. Practices developed by Eastern Partnership countries have also informed policy thinking in EU Member States.

Beyond institutional learning, the Dialogues enable peer learning between countries with different migration profiles and levels of institutional experience. States consistently name this peer-to-peer exchange — learning directly from others facing similar or related migration realities — as one of the most valued functions of the Dialogues, distinct from the more formal knowledge products and training activities they also provide.

This function is increasing in importance as migration roles evolve. Countries may simultaneously combine the roles of origin, transit, and destination, or shift between them as routes, movements, and regional dynamics change. In this context, the Dialogues let countries facing new migration realities learn from peers with more established systems and experience, and strengthen their own institutional and policy frameworks accordingly.

3.3 TRUST, SHARED UNDERSTANDING, AND MORE ALIGNED COOPERATION

Shared understanding within the Dialogues grows out of knowledge-support functions, the trusted environments created by repeated exchange, and the ability to shape agendas jointly. Over time, this can support greater alignment in policy approaches and administrative practices.

In this way, fostering a 'safe space' is central to the success of the Dialogues. By bringing together countries of origin, transit, and destination, alongside international organisations and other stakeholders, the Dialogues help create a structured setting in which actors with diverse and sometimes competing interests can engage over time. The relationships and networks built there, together with the Dialogues' informal and non-binding character, promote a trusted, less confrontational space for discussing politically sensitive migration issues. In a field marked by asymmetries of power, capacity, and interests, this matters all the more, since more formal settings may harden positions, constrain frank exchange, and/or discourage politically sensitive issues from being raised with the same level of openness.

Recurring engagement helps participants better understand one another's interests, constraints, and policy realities. Over time, this can make cooperation more informed, more realistic and, in some cases, more aligned. In the case of the EU-Africa Dialogues, for example, it has deepened European participants' appreciation of the scale and complexity of displacement-related challenges faced by African partner countries. [5] This shared understanding can also lay the foundation for agenda co-development.

Crucially, exchanges occur not only between Europe and partner countries. The Dialogues also provide a unique space for countries of origin and transit to find common ground and trade views and practices directly among themselves.

As participants converge on how they understand migration-related challenges and begin to speak a shared vocabulary, they are better placed to articulate their concerns, negotiate priorities, and shape cooperation jointly. This is reflected in the breadth of themes now covered by the dialogues, with topics extending beyond more conventional concerns of destination countries to include a wider range of issues raised by countries of origin, transit, and destination, such as development, labour migration, and protection. This diversity shows how priorities are negotiated and adjusted among participants, contributing to the Dialogues' continued relevance and legitimacy.

[5] External evaluator (2024). Final external evaluation for the project Africa-EU Migration and Mobility Dialogue II (MMD II) [Unpublished].

3.4 OPERATIONAL FOLLOW-UP AND RESULTS: WHAT EACH DIALOGUE CONTRIBUTES

Regional Migration Dialogues also contribute to tangible operational and policy outcomes, particularly where dialogue is linked to implementation mechanisms. For several participating states, they have further become instruments of foreign policy, leveraged to advance strategic relationships, initiate cooperation, and position themselves within regional migration governance frameworks.

Regional Migration Dialogues generate value by enabling pathways from political exchange to cooperation and, in a number of cases, tangible operational and policy outcomes, even if these are not directly attributable.

These cumulative functions can translate into concrete results. Across the four Dialogues, these have included policy and operational outcomes contributing to greater harmonisation, stronger operational cooperation, and more direct support for migrants. While the examples do not demonstrate causation by dialogue alone, they illustrate the different ways in which dialogue can support operational follow-up, institutional development, and practical cooperation.

Migrant Resource Centres

The Budapest Process shows how the Dialogues can help shape implementation pathways. Discussions within the Process contributed to the development of Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs), first conceptualised through Budapest Process meetings in 2013–14 and developed as operational tools to provide migration information, reduce vulnerabilities, and connect people with safe and regular pathways. They later became practical instruments for information, counselling, and reintegration support.

- Since 2016, the MRCs have reached over 1.49 million people through counselling, pre departure orientation training, community outreach, and reintegration support for returnees.
- Demand from states to extend the MRC model to additional countries testifies to its value.

Ukrainian Consultation Centres

The Prague Process demonstrates how dialogue can lead to rapid operational follow-up in response to emerging crises. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the May 2022 Senior Officials' Meeting addressed the war's implications for migration and identified possible areas for practical cooperation. Ukrainian Consultation Centres followed as support mechanisms for displaced Ukrainians, providing information in their native language and referrals to relevant services.

Missing Migrants Network & Better Migration Management Programme

The Rabat and Khartoum Processes show how regional dialogues can generate concrete mechanisms for cooperation.

- Rabat Process: The Network of National Focal Points for Missing Migrants was established in 2024. It continues to expand and has become a structured channel for cross-border coordination, information-sharing, and follow-up on individual cases involving a sensitive protection issue.
- Khartoum Process: The Better Migration Management Programme (BMM), launched in 2016, strengthens migration governance in the Horn of Africa through capacity-building, protection support, and cross-border cooperation. Since its inception, it has supported over 28,000 governmental and non-governmental actors and assisted more than 60,000 vulnerable migrants, directly or indirectly.
- Beyond these examples, the two Dialogues also operationalise priorities through the wider MMD ecosystem, including its Grants Facility, which supports locally driven follow-up by civil society, diaspora organisations, and research institutions engaged in migration governance.

4. Regional Migration Dialogues within a migration governance ecosystem

The distinct value of the four Regional Migration Dialogues examined in this paper can only be fully understood in relation to the wider migration governance ecosystem in which they operate. Their significance lies in the role they play within a fragmented landscape where bilateral engagement falls short and formal multilateral frameworks remain limited. This section explores that positioning, focusing on the Dialogues' relationship to bilateral cooperation, their whole-of-route function, and ICMPD's role as Secretariat and connector.

4.1 BEYOND BILATERAL COOPERATION

Beyond enabling cooperation, the Dialogues reduce the transaction costs of diplomacy. They allow states to reach senior counterparts, initiate bilateral discussions, and build relationships without the formal and political constraints of traditional

diplomatic engagement. Interview evidence indicates that these interactions often serve as entry points to longer-term bilateral cooperation that would otherwise be difficult to initiate.

Regional Migration Dialogues occupy a critical place in the wider migration governance ecosystem because they make structured, sustained cooperation possible in a field where it is both necessary and hard to build and maintain. In a policy area marked by fragmentation, political sensitivity, and divergent state interests, bilateral engagement alone cannot address dynamics that unfold across entire migration routes.

A bilateral approach may help resolve specific issues between two states, but it cannot by itself generate whole-of-route understanding or support more coherent responses across an entire migration corridor. The Dialogues help fill this gap by bringing a wider set of actors together in a structured, recurring format, allowing states to situate national concerns within broader regional dynamics, identify interdependencies, and explore shared priorities and potential areas of cooperation. In doing so, they support more coherent approaches to migration governance and more effective responses along migration routes.

Comparison of different forms of engagement

PLATFORM TYPE	TYPICAL STRENGTH	LIMITATION	ICMPD-FACILITATED DIALOGUES' DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTION
Global migration forums	Broad legitimacy, global agenda-setting	Less route-specific; limited operational follow-up	More focused route-based cooperation
Other regional dialogues	Regional exchange and confidence-building	Secretariat capacity and implementation links vary	ICMPD combines Secretariat support, technical expertise, country engagement, and implementation links
EU MS bilateral engagement	Direct political and operational leverage	Limited to state-to-state relationship	Dialogues create broader route-based context and access
ICMPD-facilitated Dialogues	Continuity, institutional memory, cross-Dialogue awareness, operational linkages	Dependent on sustained funding and political engagement	Connect political dialogue to technical and operational follow-up

This comparison shows that ICMPD-facilitated Dialogues do not replace bilateral or global cooperation. Rather, they connect these forms of engagement through route-based, recurring, and operationally informed platforms.

4.2 WHOLE-OF-ROUTE COVERAGE

Migration routes connect countries of origin, transit, and destination, meaning that policy choices in one place can have consequences elsewhere. The Dialogues matter because they bring together states across these linked routes rather

than treating migration as a set of isolated national issues. This whole-of-route approach requires structured cooperation across the full geography of movement.

Regional Migration Dialogues put a whole-of-route approach into practice, providing inclusive intergovernmental platforms where states along shared migration routes meet on an equal footing. Their value lies in sustaining broad participation across origin, transit, and destination countries, enabling actors to place national priorities within wider regional dynamics and tackle shared challenges in a more coordinated manner. Narrowing participation too substantially risks undermining this logic, since decisions taken in one part of a route can have direct implications elsewhere.

Taken together, the four Dialogues span major migration corridors linked to Europe, from Asia to the Eastern Mediterranean, across the Western Balkans, and from Eastern, Central, and Western Africa towards the Mediterranean. In doing so, they create structured, recurring spaces for exchange across regions that policy and diplomatic practice often treat separately. This route-based coverage is central to their strategic value, enabling cooperation across interconnected systems of movement rather than within fragmented geographic or institutional silos.

While each Dialogue operates within a distinct regional configuration, together they lay the basis for broader interregional cooperation. By linking actors across regions and policy spaces, they help reduce fragmentation. Joint initiatives between Dialogues where routes and priorities converge, such as those between the Rabat and Khartoum Processes, show how these complementarities can be developed in practice. Nevertheless, coverage is not comprehensive, and some routes connect regions and processes that are not yet systematically linked. More broadly, the Dialogues provide a structured framework through which route-based governance can be sustained, supporting continued engagement in a policy field defined by shifting dynamics and complex interdependencies.

4.3 ICMPD'S ROLE AS SECRETARIAT AND CONNECTOR

A distinguishing feature of the four Dialogues is that their Secretariats are all hosted by ICMPD. This creates a high degree of continuity, institutional memory, and cross-process awareness. Because the Secretariats sit within one organisation, coordination between them is embedded in day-to-day operations. Coordinators regularly exchange on thematic overlaps, shared challenges, and working methods. The knowledge this builds stays with the organisation as opposed to being tied to individuals, reinforcing continuity over time. It also informs ICMPD's wider engagement, as what works across different regional settings feeds into the organisation's project portfolio and country-level work.

ICMPD's added value lies not only in hosting the Secretariats, but in combining neutrality, institutional memory, country-level engagement, and implementation capacity in a way that enables political dialogue, technical exchange, and operational follow-up to reinforce one another.

ICMPD does not simply provide administrative support to the Dialogues. Its role is distinctive because it pairs a coordination function with a broader operational and country-level presence. Through its country offices, project portfolio, and long-standing engagement with national authorities in many partner countries, it stays closely connected to on-the-ground policy realities. This allows it to identify relevant actors, understand national priorities and constraints, and link political discussions with existing implementation experience and cooperation opportunities across multiple processes and country contexts. Together, these functions give ICMPD a difficult-to-replace role in supporting the Dialogues.

5. Conclusion: Regional Migration Dialogues are essential but could be used more strategically

5.1 KEY MESSAGES

The Budapest, Prague, Rabat, and Khartoum Processes fill a governance gap that bilateral channels and formal multilateral frameworks do not fully address. They provide structured platforms where countries of origin, transit, and destination can remain engaged, build shared understanding, and pursue cooperation over time. Their strategic value lies in a whole-of-route approach: because migration dynamics unfold across interconnected routes rather than isolated national spaces, developments in one part of a route can shape pressures, responses, and cooperation needs elsewhere. By connecting states along these routes, the Dialogues sustain more coherent cooperation across the full geography of movement.

Their added value is both political and practical, resting less on formal outputs than on the conditions they create for cooperation: access to counterparts, continuity of engagement, shared understanding, and pathways to technical and operational follow-up. Importantly, the Dialogues create opportunities to carry jointly identified priorities forward into implementation across migration routes, linking political exchange with practical cooperation and route-based follow-up where opportunities emerge. In a politically sensitive and fragmented policy area, this is not secondary value; it is a core component of effective governance.

For many participating states, the Dialogues provide access, continuity, and convening power that would otherwise be difficult to establish and maintain. Evaluations and interview evidence consistently highlight outcomes related to strengthened cooperation, including:

- Adaptation to route shifts and thematic priorities
- Broadened participation
- Response to crises without requiring formal renegotiation of frameworks
- Informal, low-visibility engagement that bilateralism cannot provide
- Reduced transaction costs of diplomacy
- Neutral spaces for sustained engagement on politically sensitive migration issues.

Regional Migration Dialogues create value in the space between diplomacy and implementation. They have remained relevant by combining continuity with flexibility, preserving trusted channels for exchange while adapting to changing priorities and regional realities. Their contribution is often indirect and realised over time through trust-building, agenda co-development, technical follow-up, and operational cooperation. They matter most where migration routes shift rapidly and cooperation requires sustained engagement across interconnected states.

Their value lies not only in what they produce but also in the continuity and coordination they preserve. Without Regional Migration Dialogues, governance along migration routes would likely grow more fragmented, trust would erode more easily, bilateral channels would carry the burden, and difficult issues would have fewer politically usable forums in which to be raised.

The main question, therefore, is not whether these Dialogues still matter but how best to use them. Stronger links between dialogue, follow-up, funding, and implementation would help translate jointly shaped priorities into more visible results, while preserving the features that make the Dialogues valuable: inclusiveness, trust, neutrality, and adaptability. This depends on continued alignment between political discussions, funding instruments, and implementation partners. Strengthening outcome monitoring and coordination across these elements would further reinforce impact.

For the EU, continued support for the Dialogues should be understood not simply as support for meetings, but as investment in governance infrastructure: platforms that preserve political access, sustain cooperation across routes, reduce fragmentation, and create practical pathways for lasting cooperation. The return on investment, meanwhile, should be measured not only by the number of meetings held or formal outputs adopted but by the governance capacity they sustain, including access to counterparts, continuity of engagement, route-based understanding, and pathways to follow-up. This is an ongoing value – not a one-off start-up investment. Like other forms of governance infrastructure, the Dialogues need continued support because their value depends on regular use, maintained relationships, and active Secretariat functions. Where the Dialogues generate shared value, there may be scope to explore broader or more diversified contributions over time. However, the central requirement is predictable support to maintain the trust, coordination, and follow-up functions that make the Dialogues so valuable.

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