

An Outlook on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration Review Meetings: A focus on Africa

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The Global Compact for Safe Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) is a momentous achievement in fostering global cooperation in ensuring a human rights-based approach to governing the movement of people across borders. The review meetings of the Global Compact for Migration, which are taking place since November 2020, have played a part in turning the GCM into a process, providing a space for governments to meet and discuss the progress made and needed in implementing the commitments of the non-binding agreement. Even though these meetings might look like another talk shop at the global level, they play a vital role in ensuring the GCM remains a living document.

These processes surrounding the implementation continue, however, to also highlight that the Global Compact for Migration is a document negotiated around the smallest common denominator: human rights. The President of the General Assembly at the time of its adoption, [Miroslav Lajčák](#), stressed that “It does not encourage migration, nor does it aim to stop it. It is not legally binding. It does not dictate. It will not impose. And it fully respects the sovereignty of States.” This agnostic stance towards migration hides the complex and often divided attitudes of governments towards different groups of migrants, making the relationship between the dignity and human rights of migrants and their ability to move equally ambiguous.

Migration has been recognised as a means of pursuing dignity, access to rights, and opportunity, most eloquently stated by former Secretary General of the UN [Ban Ki-moon](#): “Migration is an expression of the human aspiration for dignity, safety and a better future. It is part of the social fabric, part of our very make-up as a human family.” At the same time, trends in migration governance, even as they look to the GCM, emphasise the need for dignity and human rights in processes aimed at restricting and downright suppressing migration.

This tension between migration as a means to access a dignified life and dignifying attempts to restrict access to that opportunity is most visible in the African continent. There are several reasons for Africa’s particular relevance to discussions on migration. Migration within and out of Africa continues to highlight global, often historical, inequality as a main cause of human mobility. As [Aviva Chomsky](#), Professor of History and the Coordinator of Latin American, Latino and Caribbean Studies at Salem State University in Massachusetts wrote, “If our goal is to slow migration, then the best way to do so is to work for a more equitable global system. But slowing migration is an odd goal, if the real problem is global inequality. We should work towards this and ensure dignity for all who move.” Africa is a point of origin and destination for people who migrate to *express their human aspiration for dignity*.



At the same time, Africa's neighbour, the European Union, is continuing to externalise its borders through bilateral and multilateral agreements that reduce the movement of migrants to Europe. The European Union (EU)'s aspirations in implementing the GCM are misaligned with the aspirational view of human mobility, instead focusing on dignity and human rights in the suppression and discouragement of migration. A core component of this approach is identifying irregular migration as a site for human rights violation. Protecting migrants and stopping migrants align more easily, and the EU has identified the strengthening of migration management in countries of origin as a main approach, launching its [Emergency Trust Fund for Africa \(EUTF\)](#), to "assist countries in the Sahel region, the Horn of Africa and North Africa in addressing the causes of uncontrolled migration flows, so that harder measures, such as deployment of the EU naval force to tackle migrant smugglers in the Mediterranean, remain limited in scope." The [EU's Briefing Paper on the Global Compact](#) is titled 'Placing human rights at the heart of migration management' and this phrase captures the other side of the tension mentioned above more succinctly than I could.

The recent [Africa migration report](#) challenges this narrative about African migration as 'uncontrolled flows' and the commonly held negative perceptions about African migration and African migrants. According to the report, Africa accounts for only 14% of the global migrant population, compared to Europeans who account for 24%, and [80% of the migration of Africans](#) is intracontinental. In spite of this, Africa's relationship with the EU on the subject of migration is risking the continent's own ambitions for [free movement](#) and its implementation of the GCM.

With the growing impact of climate change, with Africa amongst the most severely impacted regions, and the economic impacts of the ongoing pandemic keenly felt, it is important that the upcoming

African review of the Global Compact for Migration finds a clear and strong voice that situates African countries in the above outlined tension in favour of migration as a means to access a dignified life.

African governments should seek to focus on regular pathways, addressing human rights violations of irregular migration by facilitating movement through clear policies for, and reduced costs of, movement. Even though the EU's external migration policies will likely pose a significant barrier, its recognition of the benefits of free movement internally through the Schengen Agreement could be a clear vision for Africa's implementation of the GCM.

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