

Preparedness for the Next Pandemic: Towards a Resilient Global Architecture on Borders and Health

Concept Note

May 19, 2022

8.30 – 9.30 am ET

Room 8, UN Headquarters, 405 E. 42nd St., New York, NY 10017

Livestreamed on UN Web TV

Background

Two years after COVID-19 halted cross-border mobility in its tracks, most countries are seeking to fully restart migration and mobility. The overall direction of travel is towards a cautious reopening, as individuals, governments, economies, and societies learn, however fitfully, to live with a virus becoming endemic. Sweeping border closures and travel bans have largely been phased out in favor of more targeted approaches, and many governments, travel operators, and ports of entry are lifting or loosening health-related restrictions.

Yet the process of reopening has been highly uneven, unequal, and uncoordinated. Even now, inconsistent standards for testing, vaccination, and exceptions, as well as incompatible health credentialing systems continue to confuse and burden travelers. Moreover, widespread inequalities in vaccine access and take-up are hindering efforts to outpace the virus as it mutates, and exacerbating inequities in who can move.

The International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) poses a timely opportunity to revisit the lessons of COVID-19, before the next variant arrives. Immediate border closures in early 2020 were uncoordinated and unprepared, leaving million stranded abroad, forcing hundreds of thousands to return home, and making many more unable to leave for work, school, or family. A growing evidence base finds that these border closures were unable to prevent the virus' arrival, and that they stayed in place long after their public health benefits had diminished. Similarly, researchers find some travel measures were able to safely maintain human mobility, but these were often used inconsistently and without the precision necessary to mitigate social harms or maximize public health benefits.

Without reviewing the lessons of COVID-19, the global community may forget the devastating costs and inequalities of pandemic-era border and mobility policies or fail to invest in the systems needed to prepare for the next public health outbreak. The current global system continues to lock many out of travel, particularly those (primarily in low-income countries) who lack access to vaccines and testing or who cannot afford quarantine. Similarly, many countries with porous borders, weak border infrastructure, or limited digitalization lack the capacity to manage health risks at the border.

Perhaps most importantly, the time is ripe to move towards a global agreement on mobility – a more resilient architecture for borders and health. With the WHO's efforts to negotiate a new pandemic treaty and revise the International Health Regulations, leadership is needed to put

mobility on the agenda and build global consensus on mobility management in times of pandemics. This side event of the International Migration Review Forum will seek to foster greater international coordination over health and mobility and promote a set of principles that are clear, equitable, streamlined, and future-focused.

Pandemic travel measures should be clear, equitable, streamlined, and future-focused

- **Clear:** they should be well-communicated, predictable, and based on clear metrics;
- **Equitable:** they should not overly burden vulnerable groups or exclude them from entry;
- **Streamlined:** they should be used sparingly, for short periods, and automatically lifted without a compelling reason to renew them;
- **Future-focused:** they should build systems and infrastructure that lay the groundwork for addressing future COVID-19 variants and ultimately, the next pandemic.

Rationale

COVID-19 and pandemic preparedness are at the heart of achieving the vision of the Global Compact for Migration and are therefore relevant to all GCM Objectives, as outlined in the UN Network on Migration's [policy brief](#) and expressed in the Secretary General's [Report on the GCM](#). The most relevant Objectives include:

- Objective 11 (manage borders), given the importance of integrated border management to facilitating essential travel and minimizing burdens of travel restrictions;
- Objective 12 (screening and referral), since pandemic-related travel measures must be predictable, transparent, and well-communicated;
- Objective 15 (access to basic services), since providing migrants with health care, vaccination, and digital proof of health status are crucial to restarting mobility;
- Objective 23 (international cooperation), as cross-border coordination can streamline border measures and restart travel more efficiently.

The Compact serves as the global roadmap for restarting safe, orderly, and regular migration in the COVID-19 pandemic, but achieving its Objectives requires significant coordination, investment, and planning in order to re-establish predictable pathways for mobility and migration. The pandemic has demonstrated the closely intertwined nature of health and mobility management. This side event will build consensus on mainstreaming health and pandemic preparedness into migration management and GCM implementation.

Expected outcomes

The event will aim to facilitate intergovernmental discussions on how to ensure that human mobility can be equitable and predictable, in the face of the ongoing and any future pandemics, especially to maintain essential intra-regional mobility across the developing world. This event will consider the possible creation of a Group of Friends to discuss cross-border mobility and pandemic preparedness – led by a group of Member States with IOM and broader UN support – to identify principles for predictable mobility during and after health crisis, learning lessons from COVID-19, and identify areas for deeper cooperation and exchange with a whole-of-government approach.

Participants

High-level interventions are planned from the International Organization for Migration, World Health Organization, Migration Policy Institute, as well as the government of Australia, Colombia, Kenya, the Philippines, and the United States, and representatives from Africa CDC, and the Quakers United Nations Office.

This event will be held in English, with an in-person audience and livestreamed on UN Web TV. In-person participants will be members of a delegation to the IMRF or otherwise accredited. **Country delegations interested in sharing commitments or statements from the floor are invited to express their interest to lhuang@migrationpolicy.org**

Agenda

Item	Speakers	Time
Opening remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Andrew Selee: President, Migration Policy Institute António Vitorino: Director General, International Organization for Migration Zsuzsanna Jakab: Deputy Director-General, World Health Organization 	8:30-8:40
Participant remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blas Nuñez-Neto: Acting Assistant Secretary, Border and Immigration Policy, Department of Homeland Security, United States Carlos Bernardo Abad Santos: Assistant Secretary for Policy and Planning, National Economic and Development Authority, Philippines Charles Munyao, Secretary, National Coordination Mechanisms on Migration, Kenya Justin Maeda: Principal Regional Collaborating Centres Coordinator, Africa Centres for Disease Control Justine Saunders: Deputy Secretary and Chief Operating Officer (COO), Department of Home Affairs, Australia Laurel Townhead: Representative (Human Rights & Refugees), Quaker United Nations Office Lucas Gómez: Head of the Office for the Attention and Socioeconomic Integration of Migrants, Colombia 	8:40-9:00
Public interventions	Delegations in the room will be invited to share commitments to support global coordination on borders and mobility. If time allows, Andrew Selee will moderate a brief discussion.	9:00-9:25
Closing remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Andrew Selee: President, Migration Policy Institute 	9:25-9:30