

International Migration Review Forum: Informal Interactive Multi-Stakeholder Hearing, United Nations Headquarters, 16 May 2022

Faith-based organizations' intervention, delivered by ICMC Director of Policy Stéphane Jaquemet

Faith-based organizations put the respect for human dignity and protection of migrants' human rights, the welcoming of the strangers, regardless of their status or motivation for being on the move, and the fight against all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance at the heart of their engagement. Faith-based organizations are also frontline responders, providing health care, education, shelter, legal aid and humanitarian assistance to migrant and local communities alike. They design these programmes with both communities, often in partnership with governments and with their financial support. Sometimes, they are also the last and only providers, with other grassroots NGOs, for vulnerable undocumented migrants, which can create considerable risk for their staff.

The Global Compact for Migration has 10 guiding principles. Seven promote the values I have just mentioned. These are: people-centred, rule of law and due process, sustainable development, human rights, gender-responsive, child-sensitive and whole-of-society approach. Two refer to governance: whole-of-government and international cooperation. Only one is about national sovereignty and State prerogatives to determine their national migration policy and priorities.

But in practice, and despite the strong humane dimension of the Global Compact, many States spend seven more times on erecting walls and restrictions than on building bridges and safe pathways.

If we consider the almost four years since the adoption of the Global Compact, we see the devastation and destruction brought by COVID, which affect both host communities and migrants. But often, disproportionately, migrants.

Regarding migrants, we have seen some good practices, such as access to vaccines or health services regardless of status, alternatives to detention and suspensions of return. These initiatives are laudable. But they were few and far between compared to harmful policies. By harmful policies I mean extreme border closures; places of detention where migrants get infected for lack of basic hygiene and health measures; migrant workers who are massively laid off, often without salary or protection; and exacerbated attacks on migrants based on systemic racism, which is often ignored and unaddressed. COVID was a defining moment for being true to the Global Compact's commitments and there is no evidence that we have collectively "passed the test".

Since the adoption of the Global Compact, the adverse effects of environmental degradation and climate change have also intensified. They are hitting those countries the hardest that are least responsible for them, and they are a known driver of displacement and migration. This requires a more determined response from States in providing safe migration pathways and funding for climate justice.

Like-minded countries may be a majority, but are confronted with other States whose policies favor a certain approach to security and perceived State interest, which often comes at the expense of people's well-being, dignity and human rights.

Unfortunately, the draft Progress Declaration reflects those tensions and the fact that, compared to the commitments made in the Global Compact, the international community has hardly made any real progress. **The lives of most migrants have not improved. In many cases, they have worsened.**

The co-facilitators' task was incredibly complicated, and we are grateful to them for creating a proper space and dialogue for all of us, the multi-stakeholders. They listened to us and took some of our concerns on board. This dialogue is precious, and we must all build on it, involving both grassroots and regional or global advocacy organizations. Most faith-based organizations are both, which makes their collective voice particularly relevant.

Sadly, some of the restrictive voices among governments have also influenced the draft Progress Declaration, weakening, *inter alia*, the commitments on regular pathways and regularization, detention, child detention, and migrant agency and participation. The human consequences of these policies must be given more weight in our deliberations.

Consequently, though preserving some of the commitments made in 2018, the Progress Declaration lacks ambition and does not create the kind of sufficiently positive dynamics where the like-minded could create a virtuous circle. The anti-migrant voices remain powerful, and we cannot compromise with them. We are on a slippery slope. It is not too late to realize that continuing on such a path condemns all of us to betray our collective commitments to the Global Compact and, more importantly, migrants, local communities, and the human dignity of all human beings. The Global Compact is not the Progress Declaration, but what governments and all of us stakeholders do at the local and national levels on a daily basis. And this is where we will all be held accountable.

Thank you!