

TOWARDS A NEW GLOBAL COMPACT ON MIGRATION

By António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations

Migration powers economic growth, reduces inequalities and connects diverse societies. The majority of migrants live and work legally. But migration is also a source of political tensions and human tragedy as a desperate minority risk their lives in the face of discrimination and abuse.

Demographic pressures and the impact of climate change are likely to drive further migration in the years ahead. The global community has a choice. Do we want migration to be a source of prosperity and international solidarity? Or do we want it to be a byword for inhumanity and social friction?

This year, governments will negotiate the first-ever overarching international agreement on migration – the Global Compact on Migration – through the United Nations.

This will not be a formal treaty; nor will it place any binding obligations on states.

Instead, it is an unprecedented opportunity for leaders to counter the pernicious myths surrounding migrants, and lay out a common vision of how to make migration work for all.

This is an urgent task. The recent video of migrants being sold as slaves is evidence of what happens when large-scale migration is not managed effectively.

How can we prevent and end these injustices?

Our thinking should be guided by three fundamental considerations.

First: we must recognize and reinforce the benefits of migration, so often lost in public debate.

Migrants make huge contributions to both their host countries and countries of origin. They take jobs that local workforces cannot fill. Many are innovators and entrepreneurs. Nearly half of all migrants are women, looking for better lives and work opportunities.

Migrants also contribute remittances to their countries of origin that added up to nearly \$600 billion last year -- three times all development aid.

The fundamental challenge is to maximize the benefits of migration while stamping out the abuses that make life hell for a minority of migrants.

Second, states need to strengthen the rule of law underpinning how they manage and protect migrants.

Authorities that erect major obstacles to migration – or restrict migrants' work opportunities – inflict needless economic self-harm and can unintentionally encourage illegal migration.

Aspiring migrants who are denied legal pathways to travel will fall back on irregular methods that may put them in danger and undermine governments' authority.

The best way to end illegality and abuse is for governments to put in place more legal migration pathways. States also need to work together more closely to share the benefits of migration,

for example through partnering to identify skills gaps in one country that can be filled by migrants from another.

Third, we need greater international cooperation to protect vulnerable migrants, as well as refugees, and we must reestablish the integrity of the refugee protection regime in line with international law.

The death of thousands of people attempting to cross seas and deserts is not just a human tragedy. Unregulated mass movements in desperate circumstances fuel a sense that borders are under threat and governments are not in control.

This leads in turn to draconian border controls which undermine our collective values and help perpetuate the tragedies.

We need urgent action for those trapped in transit camps or facing abuse, whether in South America or North Africa. We must envisage ambitious action to resettle people with nowhere to go.

We should also take steps – through development aid, climate change mitigation and conflict prevention – to avoid unregulated large movements of people. Migration should not mean suffering.

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This article was first published in The Guardian.