

BACKGROUND NOTE 4:

MAKING MIGRATION WORK FOR ALL

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF
LARGE MOVEMENTS OF PEOPLE



How do large movements of people affect migration policy?

While most migrants travel in an orderly fashion, large movements of people have refocused debates on migration. Unmanaged flows of refugees and migrants create an impression that governments have lost control of their borders, leading to hostility in public opinion, and overly draconian, sometimes counter-productive policy responses.

Many of those involved in these movements are refugees fleeing war and persecution. Often these movements include migrants looking for work, or escaping the adverse effects of climate change or environmental degradation, food insecurity and human rights violations, but who do not qualify for the specific protections provided under the refugee legal framework.

Migrants and refugees alike often suffer in degrading conditions – in detention centers

and holding camps – sold into slavery, and subjected to violence and abuse. Women face particular risks; children are inherently vulnerable.

It is often unrealistic for these individuals to return home, yet humanitarian imperatives mean they cannot remain in limbo.

There is obviously an urgent need to address these perilous movements to protect lives.

Will large movements of people continue?

It is probable that large movements of people involving migrants as well as refugees will continue, or even grow in frequency. Potential drivers include the impacts of climate change, natural disasters, demographic pressures, economic crises, political tensions, large-scale violence, repression and armed conflict.

Governments can mitigate these phenomena through development aid, climate mitigation, disaster response, security cooperation and preventive

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actions. But it will be hard to eradicate them completely or effect change quickly.

What can the world do to address large movements of people?

Although the Global Compact will largely focus on regular migration, it should include a specific strategy for dealing with large movements of people.

This should aim not only to address the immediate humanitarian challenges of large movements, but also ensure that migrants are not trapped in limbo. It is an opportunity for the international community to reiterate its commitment to the human rights of migrants, as well as the needs of long-term transit countries.

This strategy should focus on three main elements:

1. To save lives and reduce immediate suffering through increased humanitarian and human-rights based actions to assist both migrants and refugees in large movements or stranded abroad, regardless of status.
2. Mechanisms and resources to ensure that the legal status of migrants in vulnerable situations can be assessed individually and with due process.
3. Developing credible pathways for migrants who do not qualify for refugee status but face insurmountable obstacles to returning to their countries of origin. This could include a global effort to offer these vulnerable individuals temporary or permanent options for entry and stay in safe third countries.