

Building the Power of Migrant & Civil Society Voices in Dhaka before the Global Forum on Migration and Development

We must make our voices heard. Amidst the shifting landscape of global governance of migration, GCM members and our civil society partners have been playing active roles calling for migrant rights and rights-based governance of migration at local, national, regional and global levels. **Migrant and migrant-led organizations are stakeholders in migration governance.** They, we, together with civil society allies, have essential contributions to make to migration governance and policymaking in local, national and supranational contexts. Trade unions and rights-based civil society organizations must be involved in the formulation and implementation of migration-related law, policy, and practice, with organized migrant voices, including migrant women's voices, playing a key role.

We are coming together in Dhaka ahead of the governments' Global Forum on Migration and Development. It is the end of an eventful year, as well as the beginning of two years of negotiations toward a Global Compact on Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration. Governments are paying unprecedented attention to migration and migration governance. At the same time, a rising tide of racism and xenophobia has brought overtly anti-immigrant leaders into office in some countries, and they are on the threshold of power in others. These contradictory dynamics demand our focus and leadership to enable us to convey clear messages about the realities of migration and its drivers, and the need for better mobility options and protection of migrants and more equitable and sustainable development.

Amidst increasing government attention to large movements of refugees and migrants leading up to the September 19 High Level Summit, the broader context of **migration in relation to development, decent work and sustainable livelihoods** sometimes faded into the background—despite the fact that the **Sustainable Development Goals clearly reflect the broader approach.** In the September 19 outcome document, the New York Declaration, states commit to address many aspects of migration governance, not just large movements, listing 24 issues the Global Compact could address.

Moving forward, though, migrant and other civil society organizations need to consider which issues to raise, and how to raise them, with respect to which international processes—Sustainable Development Goals/Agenda 2030, Global Compact, GFMD, as well as Regional Consultative Processes. And we need to consider within our organizations and networks which issues to raise at the national level, and how to bridge work at international and national levels.

In the New York Declaration, states committed to **respect the human rights of all migrants regardless of status.** This is a moment for us to raise our voices, calling on states to make this commitment a reality for millions on the ground. With strong participation by migrant and other civil society organizations and stakeholders, and political will on the part of governments, the Global Compact could make a big difference to migration governance, bringing a rights-based framework as well as institutional and policy coherence to governance at the global level. To make this happen, we need to



insist that we have the appropriate opportunities to participate in the 2017 regional and thematic consultations—on topics including labor migration and mobility, migration and development, migrants in crisis, and addressing irregular migration.

We should insist that **irregular status not be criminalized**. There must be “firewalls” between public service providers and law enforcement, on the one hand, and immigration enforcement authorities, on the other, so that all migrants can access basic services and to report crimes without fear of detention or deportation. The absence of firewalls merely supports and facilitates criminality and the victimization of migrants, as local authorities around the world are increasingly recognizing. Irregular migration occurs because there is greater demand for labor than citizens and regular migration channels can fill. Rather than punishing irregular migrants, states should recognize the contributions—financial and otherwise—of the millions working in low-paid jobs and consider regularizing their status in the interest of fairness as well as integration and social cohesion.

Migrant and other civil society organizations should speak out on behalf of **improving the quality, not just the quantity, of opportunities for labor migration**, respecting migrants’ basic rights, including the right to join a union. Circular migration schemes with restrictions such as tying a work visa to a single employer, allowing seasonal entry for only a few years, excluding migrants from social integration and social protection—many regular migration opportunities fail to provide workers with anything close to decent work on a non-discriminatory basis equivalent to nationals. Promoting decent work would mean opening legal channels of migration for work that protects the rights of migrant workers and their families, and provides opportunities for family reunification and ultimately paths to citizenship. International labor recruitment must be well regulated, transparent and accountable, with coordinated efforts of origin and destination country government agencies to protect and promote international labor standards and provide redress for violations.

While there is potential for the Global Compact to improve mobility options and the protection of the rights of migrants, the Global Compact alone will not be able to address the fundamental structural inequalities in the global economy that drive migration—especially irregular labor migration and migration into restrictive regular migration programs. For this, progress on Agenda 2030—the Sustainable Development Goals, together with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda—offers greater potential. Much attention this past year has focused on Target 10.7, “Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”, and that is basically what the Global Compact could do. But the SDGs are much broader—Goal 10 alone is much broader, aiming to reduce inequalities within and among countries. Progress toward many, in fact most, of the SDG Goals and targets would improve people’s options for sustainable livelihood, whether they wanted to migrate or not, by reducing poverty, moving toward gender equality, combatting climate change and the displacement it will cause, and promoting decent work, just to name a few.

GCM is a multi-sectoral coalition of global and regional networks and organizations. These include large regional networks of migrant and migrant-led organizations in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas, together with labor, policy, and faith-based organizations. The Coalition serves to bridge its members’ work at national and regional levels with global governance processes. Nearly all GCM organizations are migrant or migrant-led.