

POSITIVE SIGNS, PERSISTENT SHORTFALLS

REFLECTIONS AND
BRIEF HUMAN
RIGHTS ANALYSIS
OF THE SECOND
INTERNATIONAL
MIGRATION
REVIEW FORUM



Quaker United
Nations Office

With support of the:

**Friedrich
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SUMMARY

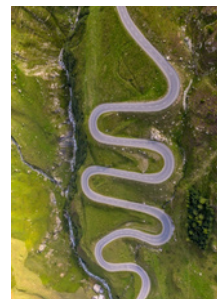
“Even though the Progress Declaration falls short of the ambition we would have preferred, we fully support it and will vote in its favor... as a possible compromise among widely different positions on migration governance and international cooperation.”

Explanation of vote: Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Uruguay, UN General Assembly, 20 May 2026

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- The Second International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) and its adoption by consensus of a Progress Declaration (PD) achieved a genuine affirmation of multilateralism that is remarkable in the context of increasing xenophobia, backlash on human rights and other challenges to the wider multilateral system.
 - Despite several important gains, however, stronger implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and its related processes is needed at all levels, so the next IMRF can truly respond to contemporary migrant realities and migration governance challenges, protect the human rights of all migrants, and ensure active and meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders, including migrants.
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A HARSHER ENVIRONMENT



THE POLITICAL MOMENT OF THE SECOND IMRF

Geopolitics shape multilateral meetings and the four years since the first IMRF and PD¹ have seen increased polarization and authoritarianism, often targeting migrants and migration for political gains, with increased anti-migrant rhetoric and policy, geopoliticization of return migration and a securitization approach.² Furthermore, the second IMRF came at a time of considerable strain, financial and otherwise, on the UN and on principled multilateralism, including human rights.

Despite these challenges, the 2026 IMRF was, ultimately, an affirmation of multilateralism. States adopted the PD without a vote, even though some did not participate or dissociated from consensus while others expressed concerns.³ Unlike 2022, the PD was voted in the UN General Assembly (GA), though an overwhelming majority of States voted in favour.⁴ This level of support – consensus at the IMRF and only one more negative vote in the GA than at the GCM's adoption in 2018 – was remarkable given the multiple and interrelated barriers to multilateralism and progress on migrants' rights at this time.

Voluntary national reports and pledges provide avenues for follow up action, and accountability, at the national level. The 2026 IMRF saw a record 95 States submit voluntary national reviews on their GCM implementation and some 60 States were represented at the IMRF at Ministerial level.⁵ More than 180 new GCM pledges were made,⁶ many by States – a particularly positive signal as States are responsible for GCM implementation.

1. A/RES/76/266.

2. Geopoliticization of return migration refers to increased prominence and leveraging of returns in State political agendas. A securitization approach frames migration as a threat e.g. by emphasising links with crime or positioning migration as a crisis, to justify policy measures to counter the claimed risk.

3. See, e.g., [Statement on behalf of Czechia, Italy, Poland and Slovakia; Statement of Chile](#), 8 May 2026.

4. A/RES/80/258. 147 votes in favour, 6 against and 23 abstentions. In 2018, the GA vote on the GCM passed 152 votes to 5, with 12 abstentions. The vote was requested by the United States, which has not endorsed the GCM and did not participate in the 2026 PD negotiations or IMRF.

5. See <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/imrf-2026-progress-reports>. The GCM encourages States to conduct reviews with stakeholders (para 53), though not all were prepared this way.

6. See, <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/the-pledging-dashboard>.

A SHORTER ROAD AND OTHER OBSTACLES

This paper does not seek to address the second IMRF's procedural and practical aspects, except to highlight two that had consequences for the PD. The second IMRF had a **shorter roadmap**, due to it taking longer to find States to co-facilitate negotiations, an earlier Easter break and being held two weeks earlier than in 2022. Limited time for scheduled consultations did not enable consensus, meaning informal negotiations continued among smaller groups of States.⁷ This created some challenges for smaller or less well-resourced State delegations and other stakeholders to engage (with civil society access at the UN in New York already more limited than in other UN centres such as Geneva) and reduced transparency.⁸

Whereas in 2022 pandemic restrictions were a major challenge, in 2026 **civil society stakeholders faced other barriers** at the IMRF and on the PD negotiations: obstacles and risks of entry to the USA and the diminished funding environment were important considerations for many.⁹

Following 2022 practice, the 2026 PD co-facilitators held online stakeholder consultations, but for approximately three fewer hours than in 2022. Large numbers joining the sessions meant speaking times were often only a minute or two and not all could intervene.¹⁰

More than 350 stakeholders, observers and international organizations did make it to the IMRF,¹¹ and the one-day multistakeholder dialogue preceding it. Limited seating at the IMRF relegated many civil society to overflow rooms for the first two days and restricted-access badges created some challenges for civil society in accessing side events or engaging with State delegations.

Replicating practices from other multilateral meetings, some States included migrant leaders in their national delegations, a good practice to keep building on – alongside meaningful migrant participation in all GCM matters.



7. See Progress Declaration and Co-Facilitators Updates at <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/international-migration-review-forum-2026>.

8. The GCM proclaimed its open, transparent and inclusive preparatory process (para 10).

9. On this and other challenges, such as the non-endorsing States and restrictions imposed by the modalities resolution, see, Kate Sheill and Laurel Townhead, *Towards More Ambitious Goals: reflections on the First International Migration Review Forum* (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, January 2024).

10. The 2026 IMRF also gave less time to the Roundtables, spaces dedicated to discuss GCM implementation (GCM, para 49(d); A/RES/73/326, para 21), than in 2022.

11. UN Network on Migration, *Global Information Brief*, June 2026.

STEPS FORWARD AND BACK

SELECTED HUMAN RIGHTS OPENINGS AND SHORTFALLS OF THE SECOND PROGRESS DECLARATION

The 2026 PD reaffirms the human rights of all migrants, regardless of migration status, recognizes them as human rights holders, and reaffirms that States must respect, protect and fulfil their human rights without discrimination (para 5).¹² This overarching recognition, including in the recommendations (para 42), aligns with international human rights law, the GCM and 2022 PD, and is important context when interpreting language on regular and irregular migration status (para 6, drawing on GCM para 15).

Similarly, the recommendation on facilitating mobility, including for regularization (para 43), and the reassertion of the principle of non-discrimination, including systemic discrimination (paras 40, 57) and, despite contestation, long-agreed language on multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (para 38), are all welcome inclusions.

The inclusion of trafficking for forced criminality (para 28, recommendation para 46) is important and, alongside reference to online scams as an emerging form of exploitation, one of the few points where the 2026 PD responds to developments affecting migrants since the first IMRF.

Though implicit, reference (para 26) to the non-punishment principle, consistent with the 2022 PD (para 60) among other negotiated texts, is also positive, though could have been explicit and accompanied by recommendations. Similarly, the inclusion of concerns about human rights implications of digital technologies in migration governance is timely with the expanding use of these tools (e.g. paras 37 and 49), although the language was watered down during the negotiations.¹³

The 2026 PD repeats the 2022 PD wording on considering, rather than committing to, end child immigration detention (para 53), despite the GCM commitment (para 29(h)). While this was watered down during negotiations, progress regarding follow up was welcome: the 2026 PD requests the UN Secretary-General's next biennial report on GCM implementation to address progress and challenges, and make recommendations, regarding child-sensitive alternatives to detention (para 53) – something not in the zero-draft but added and then strengthened throughout the negotiations.

12. The 2022 PD recognized migrants as rights holders (para 54).

The language in the 2026 PD is from A/RES/78/217 (preamble).

13. From "commit" (Rev.1 para 45) to "encourage" (Rev.2 para 45 and PD para 49). Similarly, language on "risks linked to data protection, privacy and discriminatory outcomes" (zero draft, para 16) was minimized as "challenges" (Rev.1, para 15; Rev.2 and PD, para 16). Language on "the potential for such technologies to violate migrants human rights" was not retained beyond the zero draft (para 17).

The PD's commitment (para 57) to eliminate negative stereotyping and misleading narratives that generate negative perceptions of migration and migrants is particularly welcome, though unfortunately undermined by multiple references to "illegality" of entrance or stay, rhetoric of mass migration and emphasis on securitization approaches in some States' interventions during the negotiations and at the IMRF.¹⁴

As above, consensus on the 2026 PD was remarkable given the political climate, but securing it saw some rights-affirming language in early drafts abandoned to attract broad support, and in places the 2026 PD was retrograde compared to the GCM or 2022 PD.¹⁵ For example, in the 2026 PD, States commit to "consider" (para 55) portability of social security entitlements and earned benefits, notwithstanding the existing GCM commitment and objective (GCM para 38 and objective 22).¹⁶ On border governance, language regarding a human rights-based approach to GCM implementation was weakened during the 2026 PD negotiations from "integrated and *rights*-based approaches to border *governance*" in the zero draft (para 22), to "integrated and *human rights*-based approaches to border *management*" in Rev.1 (para 19) (emphases added), to finally "integrated approaches to border management in full respect for human rights" in Rev.2 (para 20) and the adopted PD.¹⁷

Language suggesting migrants' rights may derive from their legal status (2026 PD, para 44) is troubling. Human rights are universal, based in inherent human dignity, and do not depend on documentation or legal status. Universality of human rights is distinct from States' sovereign prerogative to manage their borders and determine how best to meet their human rights obligations for people in their territories or subject to their jurisdiction or control. International human rights law does not require treating all people identically in all circumstances, but it does require that any differential treatment align with international human rights law, including non-discrimination and equality before the law.¹⁸

14. See, e.g., Statements of the [Czech Republic](#); [Czechia](#); [Italy](#); [Poland](#) and [Slovakia](#), 8 May 2026; Press release [GA/12760](#), 20 May 2026.

15. Para 15 (human rights guiding principle).

16. There was no recommendation on portability in the 2022 PD.

Attempts to rollback GCM objective 15 language on access to basic services (to access only to essential services) were unsuccessful.

17. Ensuring a human rights-based approach to GCM implementation was barely considered in the 2026 negotiations and the phrase is not in the PD, which instead uses "full respect for human rights" throughout. The distinction is subtle but important: a human rights-based approach is a framework for designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating policies and activities in accordance with international human rights standards and principles, whereas full respect for human rights is an objective that such an approach seeks to achieve.

18. To align with human rights law, any limitations on rights (that are not absolute rights) must be established by law, objective, and reasonable, and, where there is any differential treatment between nationals and non-nationals, or between non-nationals with different migration statuses, to avoid being discriminatory, it must be necessary to pursue a legitimate aim and be proportionate to that aim..

The GCM states that it is non-binding – and that it is based on international law, including human rights law. It also refers to States’ sovereign prerogative to govern migration within their jurisdictions – but also in conformity with international law.¹⁹ In the 2022 PD, attempts to include language on the GCM being non-binding and on sovereign rights in migration governance were unsuccessful. Unfortunately, these points were included in the 2026 PD (paras 3, 6), and raised in numerous States’ interventions.²⁰ This loses the balance achieved in the GCM, and attests to a wider backlash against human rights and reticence on accountability in migration governance.

In some places, the 2026 PD was unable to even reaffirm existing international obligations: e.g. there was insufficient support to include the principle of non-refoulement (prohibiting returns to serious harm),²¹ which is especially concerning given current reports of increasing violations of non-refoulement and in conjunction with the rejection of language on rights concerns regarding externalization measures.²² Similarly, though language on fair labour conditions and decent work, including mention of migrant domestic and care workers (para 15) is welcome, the 2026 PD falls short of

explicitly affirming freedom of association and collective bargaining, foundational rights essential to the protection of other rights. There was also still insufficient support to include commitment to implement firewalls between service providers and immigration enforcement, a vital human rights protection so that migrants’ access to available services is not illusory.

As in 2022, the 2026 PD could be better aligned with the GCM’s gender-responsive guiding principle. References to gender-responsive approaches remained (though repeatedly challenged in the negotiations) but more extensive consideration of women migrant workers, including in paid and unpaid care work and domestic work, was not accepted. The 2026 PD repeatedly stresses the need to include women and children, a conflation that constructs and reinforces gender norms and perpetuates the stereotype that migrants are male, driving policies and responses that discriminate against women migrants (paras 25, 40, 42, 54).

Route-based approaches to migration were prominent, being the IMRF Policy Debate’s focus and reflected in the PD recommendations (paras 60, 63, 64).²³

19. Paras 2, 7. Para 15, guiding principle on national sovereignty.

20. See, e.g. statements of [Italy, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Norway, Cyprus, Estonia, Iceland, Malta, UK, Netherlands and Sweden](#); [Ecuador](#); [Iran](#).

21. The GCM refers only implicitly to non-refoulement (para 37); the first PD does not reference it. Reluctance of some States to name or now, even describe, the principle in GCM-related texts is striking given that it is a norm of customary international law and included just last year in the GA resolution on the Protection of Migrants (A/RES/80/218). Some States have indicated a wish for a more restrictive approach, potentially narrowing the principle’s scope in relation to removals, see statement of [Sweden](#) to the IMRF, 7 May 2026, and the [Chisinau Declaration](#), 15 May 2026.

22. Rev.2, para 20, available at https://migrationnetwork.un.org/system/files/docs/rev2_imrf-pd_16april2026-1.pdf. The Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants raised the risk of violations of multiple rights in externalization of migration governance in his keynote statement on Roundtable 4 at the IMRF, 6 May 2026; see also his 2025 and 2026 reports: A/80/302 and A/HRC/62/35.

23. See, [IMRF 2026 Policy Debate](#) Concept note.

While there was broad support for stronger cooperation along migration routes, for some as a way to ensure protection and assistance for migrants across countries of origin, transit and destination, others cautioned that the concept could be used to shift responsibilities and prevent mobility.²⁴

Though the 2026 PD affirms the lawfulness of humanitarian assistance to migrants (para 26), little attention was paid in the negotiations to the criminalization of migrants and the humanitarian workers and human rights defenders who support them and work to reduce the thousands of preventable migrant deaths and disappearances each year. In the 2022 PD, States tasked the Secretary-General with producing actionable recommendations on missing migrants and humanitarian assistance to migrants in distress (para 76). The 2026 PD commits to operationalize these recommendations (para 45), but fails to articulate how or specify concrete preventative actions.

Lack of commitment on rights-based responses to climate change-related mobility fails to respond effectively to realities for current and future migrants, and to ongoing work in other parts of the multilateral system.²⁵ The 2026 PD mentions climate change only once and does not reaffirm the 2022 PD language



Secretary-General António Guterres addresses the IMRF 2026.

Credit: UN Photo

(para 59) on the need for pathways for migrants affected by disasters, climate change and environmental degradation.

There was no progress on complementarity with the Global Compact on Refugees, though several States' interventions spoke of refugees and asylum procedures.²⁶

Meaningful migrant participation is not only about the IMRF, but, more importantly, about participating in migration-related policymaking at all levels. Though the 2026 PD welcomes that some countries' GCM implementation involves meaningful participation of stakeholders, including migrants (para 9), it offers no corresponding recommendation and does not build on or even reaffirm the 2022 PD commitment (para 51). Instead, the narrower reference on women's participation (para 50, repeating 2022 PD para 56) retreats from the GCM whole-of-society approach, as well as the human rights principles underpinning it.

24. President of the General Assembly, [Second International Migration Review Forum Summary Report](#), 27 May 2026.

25. See, General Assembly: Sea-level rise in relation to international law, [A/CN.4/783](#), 3 February 2025, Advisory opinion of the ICJ on the obligations of States in respect of climate change, [A/RES/80/263](#), 29 May 2026; ICJ Advisory Opinion *Obligations of States in Respect of Climate Change*, 23 July 2025; Human Rights Council, Sea-level rise and its effects on the full and effective enjoyment of human rights, [A/HRC/RES/60/20](#), 9 October 2025.

26. See, e.g., statements to the IMRF of [Armenia](#), [Sweden](#), [Zambia](#).

FINAL REFLECTIONS



The adoption of the 2026 PD by consensus, as well as the high degree of State and stakeholder engagement throughout the IMRF processes, including increased voluntary national reviews and pledges, are all positive - especially in the 2026 political climate. However, the GCM commits to facilitating migration, and the 2026 PD does not attain the ambition needed for migration justice.

Just as the last four years have seen significant changes in attitudes to migration and migrants' rights, the political landscape will be different in 2030. Nonetheless, the GCM's commitment to solidarity, acknowledging that no State can address migration alone and the need for a whole-of-society approach, along with its commitment to international human rights law and putting individuals at its core, will remain apposite. The third IMRF should take place in 2030.²⁷ This is also the scheduled end for the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is likely to be a major focus for States and the GA's work. The GCM is rooted in the 2030 Agenda and recognizes sustainable development as a guiding principle. Migrant realities must thus inform what comes after the SDGs, without that process subsuming the next IMRF, displacing focus on GCM implementation review and migrants' human rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS

THE LESSONS OF THE SECOND IMRF & PD ARE CLEAR:

1 The next IMRF and PD must centre human dignity and a human rights-based approach to migration governance over rights-restricting political agendas. To do this, more States need to reaffirm commitment to international human rights law and multilateralism, understanding these as an exercise of sovereignty rather than fuelling misinformation that the GCM is an attack on State sovereignty.

2 The next IMRF *Progress Declaration* needs to live up to its name by better addressing migrant realities and emerging challenges – regarding gender-responsive implementation, pathways for diverse migrations, missing migrants, externalization, or climate change, for example – balanced with State concerns, and coupled with commitment to concrete actions for achievable progress.

3 The PD is the outcome document of a process reviewing GCM implementation. For the next IMRF and PD to better reflect the GCM's promise of rights-based migration governance, there needs to be better GCM implementation and review well beyond the IMRF itself through local, national, regional and international levels.

4 While the IMRF and UN processes are State-led, the GCM's whole-of-society approach requires enhancing civil society and other stakeholder engagement, including migrants and migrant-led organizations, at all levels as well as in GCM implementation more broadly. This will require the 2030 PD co-facilitators and GA President to commit to inclusive and meaningful stakeholder participation in the IMRF-related processes,²⁸ and require States and other actors to create, support and expand opportunities for active stakeholder engagement in GCM implementation and review at all levels, and for civil society, including migrants and migrant-led organizations, to proactively seize such opportunities.

28. Noting that the IMRF is convened under GA rules of procedure.

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