
THE GOVERNANCE OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Defining the Potential for Reform in the Next Decade

COUNCIL STATEMENT

By Demetrios G. Papademetriou
Convener, Transatlantic Council on Migration

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The Sixth Plenary Meeting of the Transatlantic Council on Migration

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Acknowledgments

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I. Setting the Stage: Toward Greater Cooperation on International Migration

The growth and spread of international migration during the past two decades¹ has fueled a search by many among the large and increasing number of states that now engage the migration system energetically to achieve better, more effective regulation of migration and to make it more beneficial for all actors involved. The preferred avenues for pursuing these objectives: an expanding circle of regional consultative mechanisms and, as of 2007, the Global Forum on Migration and Development, a state-led annual exercise that regularly attracts about 80 percent of the world's states and, in a separate event, hundreds of NGO leaders and activists from around the globe.

While greater international *regulation* of migration may be an objective for some of these actors, the more reasonable objective of this international activism is improved cooperation on (or at least coordination of) migration. And although individual states' reasons for engaging in such conversations vary, they can be reduced to the fact that individually most states lack the knowledge, resources, capacity, will, or political and economic capital and incentives to respond to some of the most pernicious effects of migration.

Greater international cooperation, then, becomes the vehicle for responding to some of the widely recognized challenges that migration poses for countries and communities of origin, host countries and communities, and migrants and their families.

Some have argued that this calls for more “global governance” of migration — loosely defined as the creation of a more or less formal set of norms and rules to regulate the behavior of states with respect to the movement of people across borders. Yet there has been no definitive analysis of what *specifically* greater international cooperation should aim to accomplish or the practical forms it should take. While governments can agree on a basic set of goals — such as reducing illegal migration, eliminating deaths and abuses in transit, and curbing the proliferation of smuggling and organized crime — there is still no consensus on how to act collectively to pursue these goals.

The Transatlantic Council on Migration met in June 2011 to consider how to improve the governance of migration — a quintessentially international issue by definition — closely scrutinizing the evidence on the ground and proposing a way forward that peers beyond the “global governance” mantra in favor of practical, gradualist, and organic steps that achieve more effective, multilayered cooperation.

International Migration Front and Center

Despite the reality that the Great Recession virtually zeroed out net immigration to all but a handful of high-income countries, concerns about the resumption of unwanted migration continue to drive popular thinking and shape governmental actions in most highly developed economies.² Europe's preoccupation with the potential migration implications of the so-called Arab Spring (which, for Europe, have been rather modest so far³) are a case in point.

1 The United Nations estimated the global migration stock at about 214 million in 2010. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, “International Migration Stock: The 2008 Revision,” <http://esa.un.org/migration/index.asp?panel=1>.

2 Yearly flows, both wanted (such as students, legal temporary workers, businesspersons, and tourists) and unwanted (e.g. unauthorized immigrants, fraudulent asylum seekers, people fleeing unstable political and bleak economic situations, and, in many countries, even family members), are not showing signs of abating. The authors of this Council Statement estimate annual flows at between 15 million and 25 million (this number excludes tourists). Measurement issues, however, make it difficult to estimate with precision the international migrant stock. And flow numbers are very much subject to who is counted and how multiple short-duration entries are scored, and on the true size of the very-difficult-to-estimate low-income-to-middle-income and intra-middle-income country movements.

3 As of mid-August 2011, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that about 54,000 persons



The growth in all types of migration over the last two decades has made the subject a staple of economic and political conversation in both sending and receiving states and, increasingly, between them. At issue is a noble-but-nebulous interest in maximizing migration's benefits for all concerned — sending households and communities (and societies), receiving communities (and societies), and the protagonists in the process: the migrants themselves — and in minimizing its costs. The fact that reducing the costs allows benefits to become both larger and more obvious makes this aspect of the overall effort particularly appealing.

I. The Calculus for Receiving Societies

For receiving countries, the benefits of migration are primarily economic in character.⁴ For many of the same countries the costs are also significant, but typically much more complex, as they are often spread throughout society — and in not always easy-to-isolate ways. As a result, the downsides are difficult to tackle successfully. The costs revolve chiefly around two sets of issues: border management and security,⁵ and the often messy labor market, social, educational, and cultural effects of some forms of migration.

Originally primarily a US preoccupation, border security is now a common concern across the North Atlantic region as European governments have also come to realize that the very well-organized attempts to enter the European space are difficult to inhibit without a determined — and costly and probably socially divisive — effort. Europe faces a particularly difficult challenge in this regard because it has been very late in organizing itself to address these issues at the level of the European Union. Moreover, Europe has not yet come to terms with the two matters that put it at a distinct disadvantage relative to the syndicates that organize (and profit immensely from) illegal immigration and their determined cargo: The lack of a robust border surveillance and control capability and an honest conversation about the rights and protections that should be afforded those who ignore states' prerogative to define who has the right to remain in their sovereign space.

The border surveillance and control topic implies large costs and substantial soul-searching about how aggressively to pursue tighter external borders, and even more importantly, how to parse out responsibilities between Europe's central institutions and Member State governments. However, the recent existential challenge to the Schengen system — one of the European Union's signal achievements — may have inadvertently started a real conversation about the need to harden external borders in order to maintain an internally borderless Europe, as well as a process for addressing this connection. The question of the ability to remove most illegal entrants is a much more difficult challenge because it goes deeply into the essence of rights most Europeans identify with and the jurisprudential edifice that Europe has built for itself in this regard.

If border management and security issues are complicated, addressing some of migration's labor market and socio-cultural effects — and the growing reaction to them — is in many ways even more complex, if perhaps not always as close to core foundational and governance principles. The mounting unease in these policy realms has been fueled by a number of issues. Among them: (a) evidence of flattening

from North Africa had crossed into Italy and Malta, the main entry points into Europe. See UNHCR, "Hundreds of new arrivals in Italy from Libya and Tunisia," (briefing notes, August 16, 2011), www.unhcr.org/4e4a505f9.html; UNHCR, "Revision to the UNHCR Supplementary Budget: The Libya Situation 2011," July 2011, www.unhcr.org/4e32cf979.html. About 1 million people have left Libya, crossing into surrounding countries. UNHCR, "Humanitarian Situation in Libya and the Neighbouring Countries," Update No. 30, June 22, 2011, www.unhcr.org/4e0201a09.html. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that nearly 660,000 international migrants have fled Libya as a direct result of the armed conflict. IOM, "IOM Response to the Libyan Crisis," External Situation Report, August 18, 2011, www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/media/docs/reports/IOM-sitrep-MENA.pdf.

- 4 Among the benefits at the core of migration's plusses: (a) filling jobs across the economy; (b) responding to demographic and skills imbalances; (c) contributions to innovation and entrepreneurship; (d) freeing well-educated natives (particularly women) from child- and elder-care responsibilities so they can practice their profession; and (e) contributions to the overall economy (through consumption and taxation).
- 5 The border management and security topics were the focus of the November 2010 meeting of the Transatlantic Council on Migration, "Restoring Trust in the Management of Migration and Borders."



wages at the lower end of the wage continuum in several countries, especially those with less regulated labor markets; (b) the fueling of underground economies; (c) the creeping realization that social support commitments that had long been thought of as inviolable are probably unaffordable;⁶ (d) a growing sense in nearly all countries of failing to educate and prepare some immigrant groups and their offspring for lives of full social participation and economic success; and (e) cultural anxieties ranging from some immigrant cohorts' lack of (and in some instances, apparent indifference to obtaining) local language skills, to the perception of a flagging acceptance of the host societies' norms and work ethos.⁷

2. Sending Societies and their Concerns about the Status Quo

If receiving societies are asked to figure out a complicated calculus when it comes to gaining more from migration, sending societies are equally concerned about the status quo. Their dependence on migration seems to be growing, rather than abating, almost regardless of how long they have been engaged in the process. (This reality tends to be downplayed, if not overlooked, by migration enthusiasts but has fueled a growing field of skeptics who see in migration both an “easy pass” for governments that are not thinking hard enough about the wellbeing of their citizens at home and a kind of subsidy by poor nations to better-off ones.)

The priorities of sending countries include predictability of and growth in work visas, the safety and protection of their nationals, issues of rights (labor, social, and in extreme cases, human rights), and the ability to participate as much as possible in shaping the selection and conditions under which their nationals will be engaged. (The selection issue has become increasingly important as receiving countries aim ever higher in the skills and qualifications scale of their prospective immigrants.)

II. Broadening the Conversation on the Governance of Migration

These are the complex and competing priorities with which sending and receiving states come to the many bilateral, regional, and multilateral conversations about “improving the governance” of international migration. In many ways, the headline interests of each side are clear. Most sending countries have long wanted to engage receiving societies in conversations that will acknowledge the legitimacy of and address their concerns about how their nationals are treated while simultaneously making the case for greater openness to migration. After all, binding international agreements “enforced” by an international entity are the tools of weaker states on matters where power asymmetries are as large as they are for migration. And although achieving an international agreement may still be a key — if unrealistic — goal for some of them, their agitation at the UN General Assembly has already had its small “victories,” in the form of a number of multilateral initiatives on migration during the last decade. (Many of these are discussed ably by Kathleen Newland and Alexander Betts in chapters elsewhere in the Council's forthcoming book on this subject, *The Governance of International Migration*.⁸) The culmination of these efforts has been the state-led Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) — probably as good an outcome as one could have expected in 2006, considering the interests and priorities of receiving states.

⁶ This issue cuts both ways, that is, immigrants also help finance social support systems, a matter that is often “lost” on critics of immigration.

⁷ Some conflation and oversimplification are inevitable here in order to capture key issues across countries with a wide range of immigration systems and experiences. Moreover, the manner in which some countries experience these issues — and the policy responses to them — are shaped by the way in which each society is organized, including how government relates to the private sector and its civil society.

⁸ See Kathleen Newland's chapter in Section II, “Global Governance: Fear and Desire,” and Alexander Betts' chapter, “The Governance of International Migration: Gaps and Ways Forward,” in Section III of *The Governance of International Migration*, eds. Bertelsmann Stiftung, Migration Policy Institute (Guetersloh, Germany: Bertelsmann Stiftung, forthcoming).



As one might expect, receiving states want to maintain their ability to recruit only the immigrants they desire (emphasizing skills above all else) and under conditions that may benefit from sending-country cooperation but are not subject to “interference” by them. The cooperation receiving states seek is easily reduced to sending states taking their nationals back when their contracts expire and when they violate the host society’s rules. With illegal immigration growing, however, receiving countries have also come to expect sending (and transit) countries to actively assist them in preventing such flows. These interests set the stage for different types of conversations which involve substantial investments of political and economic capital. The two archetypes for these forms of conversation were constructed in North America — in the nearly two-decade-old US-Mexico conversation on borders and migration and the first-ever regional migration forum (the so-called “Puebla Process” that dates back to the mid-1990s). The latter concept has been adapted and replicated in the many regional conversations, now known as “regional consultative processes” (RCPs), that occur regularly in many of the world’s regions and subregions, the creation of “policy networks,” the still embryonic inter-regional dialogues, and, of course, the GFMD.

The realization that organized trafficking syndicates have been drawing ever bigger profits *at the expense of* societies, governments, and immigrants and their families all along the migration arc, have made the potential benefits of participation in such conversations ever more obvious. In fact, even the United States, which typically resists engaging in multilateral conversations unless it sees an articulable national interest, sent its first-ever “high-level” delegation to the GFMD in 2010. The challenge, and the opportunity, then, has become building meaningful conversations around common interests and allowing an evolving “habit” of working together — and its key byproduct, growing trust — to create the virtuous cycles that, over time, can meet many, and eventually perhaps even most, of each side’s objectives. An agenda of safe, secure, legal, and orderly migration⁹ probably captures most of these shared objectives.

The Transatlantic Council’s deliberations made clear its broad support for such conversations and pointed to the importance of pursuing multilayered forms of cooperation that are practical and emerge organically from the ground up. As with all sensitive issues in which vital interests are at stake, impatience and over-reaching with regard to outcomes quickly become counterproductive. States can gain the maneuvering room to tackle more ambitious agendas by first agreeing to small experiments (“baby steps”) in which all parties are held equally accountable and by focusing on being able to demonstrate a model’s success.

Pursuit of these agendas, however, is complicated by the rogues’ gallery of unscrupulous actors — smugglers, traffickers, abusive recruiters and other middlemen, exploitative employers, self-interested consumers, families seeking to bring in relatives outside of legal channels, and inattentive or colluding governments — who increasingly shape the rules of the migration game. The actions of these actors fuel rising anti-immigrant sentiment in many wealthy states, which in turn reduces the space for thoughtful policy experimentation and leads to the collective inertia that has robbed migration of the ability to demonstrate its full value. These actions also prevent migrants from receiving fair compensation for their work, subvert their rights, and make migration a more costly and dangerous proposition than it needs to be.

III. Issue Areas Ready for Much Greater Bilateral and Multilateral Cooperation

The challenge that the Transatlantic Council posed for itself, therefore, was to begin to identify areas

⁹ *Safe* refers to physical safety during passage; *secure* refers to knowing the identity of an immigrant and his/her background — an essential precondition in a period of sustained concern with security; *orderly* refers to building a migration system whereby foreign workers are doing jobs that local workers can’t/won’t do and migrants are treated in accordance with all labor and social rights pertaining to their work status and comply with all pertinent laws and regulations; and *legality* requires no explanation other than including not only entering and staying legally but also working in the formal economy.



where states might have the most to gain from greater bilateral and multilateral cooperation — and where they are likely to be most successful — in the coming years, as well as articulating the tools and principles that can foster cooperation.

The Council identified six such areas.

1. **Thwarting “bad actors.”** Governments at all points along the migration arc can work much more closely together to minimize the opportunities that pernicious actors exploit for their own illicit gains, often operating with relative impunity.¹⁰ The first step in fostering greater cooperation in this area — and hence laying a foundation for demonstrating that international cooperation on migration-related issues can bear more fruit than unilateral action — should be to identify and target the worst offenders, especially those who deliberately victimize others. As migration routes multiply and diversify, governments all along the migration arc must communicate and coordinate better if they are to gain the deeper understanding of the business model, support infrastructure, and routes used by these actors. Only then can coordinated action to intercept, disrupt, and, over time, root out, such networks stand a chance of success. By thus “learning by doing,” and building trust among policymakers and enforcement agencies across borders, a cooperation model can be tested and the case for more robust bilateralism and multilateralism can be made. The discussions identified US collaboration with Mexico and Central America in these matters as worthy of closer examination and, after appropriate adaptations, partial replication.
2. **Increasing the supply of human capital.** Skill shortages and mismatches will continue — and grow — in all parts of the world. Typically, most bilateral and multilateral conversations about skills gravitate toward the well-documented skill appetites of the more advanced industrial economies and their inability to meet all their needs from within. The adequacy and development of skills, however, is equally, and perhaps even more important, for middle-income countries and even low-income ones. In fact, the skills needs of the fastest growing among the middle-income countries are poised to become a critical competitive issue with high-income countries in the very near future, more so than recognized at present. (China, India, and, increasingly, Brazil, are already there, while Russia is also beginning to recognize the importance of the issue.) Hence one of the most obvious and fruitful areas for cooperation: building up human-capital reservoirs through bilateral and regional cooperation on education and workforce development that, over time, lead to the development of recognized standards in key occupations and sectors. Doing so gives citizens better opportunities to advance while building their country’s economy. And while one can remain relatively agnostic about the levels and direction of future migration flows, the frequent concern about the “quality” of much of today’s migration can be mitigated with well-prepared immigrants, setting the stage for future migration to be more of a genuine choice, rather than a dire necessity.

The Council’s discussions on this deeply neglected human-capital development policy area were profoundly practical: focusing on region-wide labor market, education, and workforce development policies can build up and more efficiently allocate a region’s human capital and set the stage for creating an engine for personal opportunity and societal growth. The promise of pursuing this line of action fits both the North American and Euro-Mediterranean regions equally well and has been one of the most sensible and compelling of Tunisia’s requests to the European Union and the international community. Just as the joint management of shared resources is a necessary component of a sustainable regional environmental policy, so is collaboration to further develop, harness, and smartly share a region’s greatest natural resource: the river of human capital that flows throughout it.

The challenge and the opportunity in this regard coalesce around practical collaborative

¹⁰ The issue of bad actors became one of the refrains of the two-day conversation. As a result, the Council members decided to devote a future Council session to this topic.

solutions to modernizing education, workforce development, and, gradually, the qualifications and credentialing systems so that they are recognized throughout the region. Thinking about labor matching and better integrated regional job ladders — both essential preconditions to greater inter-regional mobility — are also part of the equation. Collaboration can then spill over to the equally important issues of regional labor standards, harnessing (and allocating) demographic and skill complementarities fairly and efficiently, new migration policy tools (such as circularity), and smarter integration policies. Doing well in these areas, in turn, leads to higher wages, expanding local economies, greater and more shared prosperity, and a more globally competitive region.

Making real progress on these issues is the first step to breaking the distressing cycle of illegality, exploitation, human-capital waste, family disruption, and more generally the social disorder and meager development outcomes that the status quo offers. The goal is thus both noble and practical: The road to more jobs and family-supporting wages and less inequality can be achieved by identifying and exploiting the complementarities within a region and investing in further developing its human-capital resources in more cooperative and coordinated ways. These are also the essential preconditions to greater and more shared prosperity and greater intra-regional mobility.

3. ***Experimenting with small-scale migration/mobility agreements.*** There are literally hundreds of examples of bilateral agreements that more or less directly address migration issues. Only a small proportion of them, however, provide potential “models” that, upon independent evaluation, can be identified as worthy of emulation. Agreements involving Canada, both the federal government (chiefly in the agricultural field) but much more interestingly, a number of Canadian provinces (primarily between the “Prairie” provinces and the Philippines and Mexico, but most ambitiously, the still-evolving agreement between Quebec and France that would allow each other’s nationals to live and practice their profession in either country) are particularly intriguing. Their appeal is that they seem to be well-conceived, implemented apparently with few management lapses, and are receiving good grades in how responsive the programs are to the needs of the receiving states and how fair the conditions appear to be for foreign workers. The many bilateral agreements between France, Spain, and several other EU Member States with several Maghreb and sub-Saharan states, were also discussed, as were the handful of model mobility partnership agreements¹¹ involving the European Commission and interested EU Member States with Moldova, Cape Verde, and Georgia. However, the small number of visas involved and the diverse motives behind these agreements — and their short lifespans so far — raised legitimate questions both about scalability and, to a much lesser degree, relevance.

The discussion indeed noted that most of these agreements are still in the testing stage and as a result are not ready to be replicated. Their promise is nonetheless significant and the participants strongly encouraged the systematic evaluation of such agreements and the widest possible dissemination of the results so that good practice can be considered, adapted, and adopted by other countries.

4. ***Filling safety and protection gaps for vulnerable migrants.*** The crisis in North Africa and the ever-present safety challenges for would-be unauthorized immigrants on both sides of the North Atlantic highlight important gaps in the safety and protection of migrants. The southern Mediterranean situation deserves particular attention in two ways: safety for those who take to the sea in order to reach Europe’s shores;¹² and assistance and protection for the more

11 Mobility partnerships are loose, nonbinding frameworks of government-to-government cooperation in the area of migration, based on political declarations (so-called Joint Declarations). For more on mobility partnerships, see Agnieszka Weinár’s chapter, “EU Mobility Partnerships: A Model for International Cooperation on Migration?” later in this volume.

12 About 1,500 would-be immigrants are estimated to have perished in the Mediterranean in the first eight months of 2011, according to UNHCR. See UNHCR, “Hundreds of new arrivals in Italy from Libya and Tunisia.”



than 1 million persons who have fled the war in Libya¹³ (more than half of whom are still in Tunisia). Those who fall into ambiguous categories — being neither economic migrants nor eligible for international protection under the Refugee Convention (the UN High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] reports the latter number at less than 4,000 persons as of mid-August) — and cannot be returned to their home countries because of safety concerns there are of particular concern to the international community. And while very positive reports about the energy and on-the-ground cooperation between the two major international agencies operating in the region — the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR — are encouraging, major issues remain unresolved. These include the resettlement of those whose asylum claims have been validated;¹⁴ securing adequate resources for the countries that have been bearing the brunt of the exodus from Libya (with Tunisia in the lead by far, followed, in order, by Egypt, Niger, Chad, Algeria, and Sudan); *and the disproportionate political attention to the relative trickle of would-be immigrants arriving into Malta and Italy.* The politicization of that issue naturally dominated the discussion on this topic, as it had much of the European Union since early in the year, while the Tunisian government's cooperation with the European Union under difficult circumstances received much positive commentary.

5. **Mitigating the effects of climate change.** The range of estimates of the number of people who might move as a result of climate change is so large as to be useless for policymaking. The question nonetheless remains near the top of both migration and environmental gatherings. At issue is whether governments will cooperate — and how much, and in what form — to mitigate the likely additional flows of people who lose their livelihoods as a result of rising sea levels, extreme drought, flooding, severe storms, diminished agricultural productivity, and other direct and indirect effects of climate change. The myriad linkages that alarmists attempt to make between climate change and migration are not nearly as clear as might be suggested by the cases of the few small island states that are becoming gradually uninhabitable (involving perhaps just a few hundreds or thousands of people). Generalized environmental degradation has a devastating impact on people and thus a much larger effect on movement. Deforestation and overgrazing, poor irrigation practices, soil erosion resulting from cultivation of steep slopes, the silting of rivers and dams, degradation of urban watersheds, violent conflict over access to resources, and many other threats to livelihood occur independently of climate change.

Migration nonetheless is only one of the forms of adaptation by people whose livelihoods are severely stressed by environmental forces. And while most climate-induced migration will be internal to the affected countries, some people will cross borders, usually to neighboring states. Some may go farther afield. The policy challenge in view of the issue's complexity is to understand better how states at the receiving end of this kind of flow should think of these migrants.

Most conversations about policy responses to environmental migration currently fall quickly into two main categories: offering *legal protection* to people who have been affected by environmental change and focusing on *sustainable development and adaptation* strategies, programs, and projects to help people adjust to their deteriorating environments. The discussions gravitated strongly in the direction of the latter course with an emphasis on pragmatic investments designed to build resilience. This approach has both the greater chance of success and public support.

Policy development in this regard can be helpfully differentiated into short-, medium-, and long-term interventions. In the *short term*, palliative actions such as humanitarian assistance

13 More than 834,000 persons fled to Tunisia from Libya; most of them were Libyans. Of the total number of Libyans (582,465), only 90,000 were still in Tunisia in mid-August. UNHCR, "UNHCR Southern Tunisia Weekly Update," August 1, 2011, www.unhcr.org/4e37c5356.html.

14 It has become clear that most EU Member States will consider resettlement only in the context of a "comprehensive approach" to the issue and that some will not consider it even then.



and small-scale relocation are necessary to save lives and prevent suffering. Better coordination at regional and international levels would be particularly helpful here. In the *medium term*, development agencies should give priority to adaptation strategies to help communities build resilience. Mitigation strategies must be pursued for the *long term*. One thing is perfectly clear: the more thoughtful the interventions in the short and medium terms, the less necessary an international migration response will become.

6. **Reducing costs for migrants.** The Council also discussed the need for lowering the costs incurred by migrants prior to their movement and while abroad. These include reducing the transaction fees for remittances; guaranteeing the payment of earned wages; allocating more fairly transit, training, and other costs; and making greater progress toward the portability of social security and certain other work-related benefits. Progress on these issues is not only a matter of being fair to migrants and protecting their rights, but also a means of amplifying the development benefits of migration. As such, this makes for another area where the policy interests of groupings of sending and receiving societies can coalesce around smart and just solutions.

In all of these areas, and the many additional ones that were discussed, the Council returned repeatedly to the fact that growing public skepticism about migration requires persuading publics that smarter international cooperation will be able to address what they consider “broken” about the status quo. A sampling of targets: much greater cooperation in controlling unwanted migration; countries of origin taking back their nationals who are no longer eligible to remain in host societies; and better preparation of prospective immigrants prior to admission (an increasing priority in Europe). Nor do publics appear to be in the mood currently to listen to repeated mantras about the looming “demographic deficit” as an action-forcing event for admitting more foreign workers and of migration as an antidote to rapidly aging societies.¹⁵ The relative unresponsiveness to the demographic argument is twofold. First, the argument assumes that labor market conditions will remain as they are today; that is, that there will be no adjustments that reallocate labor, reduce labor demand through new technologies, bring underutilized groups into the labor force, export certain low value-added production activities, etc. Second, arguments about impending labor shortages run against the experiences of most people on the ground, who see many unemployed and underemployed workers in their midst — experiences that have intensified since the Great Recession. The fact that many people do not seem to respond to things they do not like to do until confronted with a problem face-to-face may make them view demographics as an issue for the future, and classify it as such, particularly when they consider the full range of “costs” associated with the response (more migrants).

IV. The Building Blocks to Greater Bilateral and Multilateral Cooperation on Migration

As with all difficult policy areas, learning by doing may be the only route to greater international cooperation, especially when self-interest is paramount and issues of sovereignty are thought to be as strongly at stake as they are with migration. Going beyond unilateralism also requires care in choosing which level of cooperation is the most appropriate: bilateral solutions work best on some issues and in some regions (such as with the US-Mexico relationship), but they do not exclude the pursuit of region-

¹⁵ The Council has considered many facets of this question in previous meetings. These have included: the intersection between demographics and migration and the skill deficits and mismatches that virtually every industrial democracy faces (and which are expected to intensify as the BRIC [Brazil, Russia, India, and China] countries race ahead); the critical importance of demonstrating control over one’s borders and strong management skills in managing immigration flows; the imperative of showing real progress in immigrant integration; and developing an immigration narrative — and the necessary evidence — that builds public support for immigration.



wide collaborations nor do they mean that broader multilateralism should not be sought on very specific matters. Combating human trafficking is a case in point in which all three types of collaboration can (and do) get used in the search for better results.

Not everybody agrees with this gradualist approach, which focuses on solving problems one step at the time. Yet the value of seeding and nurturing habits of cooperation which, over time, can set the stage for substantive collaboration cannot be denied. For instance, one of the lessons one can draw from the Puebla Process and other regional consultative processes is that they can be useful *even if they do not easily result in concrete policy changes*. The experience with thickening multilateralism also suggests a number of additional lessons. Among them are that “starting small and building up” is as good a tactical approach as any. In that narrative, incrementalism that focuses on addressing practical challenges one at a time becomes the down payment to more ambitious policy agendas.

Box 1. Levels of Governance

The following levels of governance offer different lenses and tools through which to view and tackle migration-related challenges.

1. Bilateral agreements

Bilateral agreements between states (or mobility partnerships in the context of the European Union) can be seen as a first step in a wider pattern of international cooperation. They allow each state to engage on the content and level of intensity that is right for them; nonetheless, bilateral agreements are often criticized because they can sustain asymmetric power relationships between origin and destination countries.

2. Regional processes

Creating the first layers of governance (beyond the bilateral relationship) can best be done regionally, based on identifying common goals among geographically proximate partners, rather than immediately jumping to the global level. The inception of the European Union as a mechanism for regional economic cooperation, which then grew organically over decades based on the evolving needs and desires of its members, is perhaps the best example of this.

3. Multilateral forums

The international system should step in when there are coverage gaps resulting from bilateral and regional arrangements, as was the case in Libya during the Arab Spring. This could develop through on-the-ground, practical partnerships rather than being codified in formal multilateral arrangements.

4. Unilateral action

Sometimes states are better off addressing certain matters alone—particularly when international cooperation is seen as intruding into state sovereignty (i.e., setting the rules for who is allowed to enter one’s territory).

Nonetheless, some still argue that the difficulty of trying to deal with the most unacceptable forms and effects of international migration bilaterally, even subregionally, and regionally calls for more “global governance” of migration — loosely defined as the creation of a formal set of rules to regulate the behavior of states with respect to the movement of people across borders. Yet there has been no persuasive or definitive analysis of what *specifically* greater international cooperation should aim to achieve or *what it would look like in practice*. While governments can agree on a basic set of goals — such as more secure borders, eliminating deaths and abuses in transit, reducing illegal migration and the



growth of the underground economy, curbing exploitation, and attacking the proliferation of organized crime — there is no consensus on how to act collectively to pursue these goals.

Receiving states remain reluctant, if not outright opposed, to the United Nations playing a bigger role or to elevating IOM into the UN system. Even the creation of the GFMD in 2006 initially engendered opposition. It moved forward only by casting itself as a state-led, informal process oriented around policy and *practical* programs. Most observers believe that a UN-led process (even a nonbinding one) would not have been agreed to, showing how difficult it is to elevate even the most informal migration processes to the international level.

Of course, cooperation and partnership at all levels of governance can involve various degrees of formality (from nonbinding processes to those enshrined in law), institutionalization (from ad hoc arrangements in a crisis to systematic cooperation), and results (from procedural cooperation to concrete policy achievements). Furthermore, each may involve different actors, from formal government participants to informal civil-society observers. There are lessons to draw from each approach.

As noted throughout this document, informal mechanisms like RCPs or the GFMD might not immediately yield “concrete” policy achievements, but they are critical in developing the cooperative spirit that lays the groundwork for better governance. These dialogues and consultations are sometimes criticized as being “talking shops;” but if done correctly, they can build trust among actors, gather data and information on good practices, and allow states to generate consensus in an incremental, even organic way. While there is no guarantee that these forums will evolve to the point of tackling substantive and contentious issues, forcing these issues on the agenda before trust is established is almost always certain to backfire.

V. Putting Ideas and Talk into Play Effectively

One essential way in which informal, nonbinding processes build trust is by fostering policy networks — a fabric of deep relationships among individuals, ministries, and governments that might not otherwise collaborate. Enhanced coordination across government departments is an important potential outcome from these relationships, which can mainstream migration into other portfolios (such as development) and ensure that officials have a common understanding of the forces behind migration. These repeated interactions can also help prepare more timid governments for international negotiations, and can be an important engine for drawing civil society into the debate.

This type of cooperation, if successful, can also lead to *implicit* norm-setting. Groups adopt a certain tone and set norms at a tacit level. It is impossible to measure how successful these kinds of “cultural changes” that happen in regional forums are, but they can be important. Moreover, these forums can be testing grounds for policy ideas and a place to showcase “model agreements” that might be emulated by other states. In the long run, such forums might also change practices as a result of the informal conversations that are their trademark.

Finally, if and when states agree on a set of basic goals for better managing migration and on the strategies to reach these goals, they must then allocate responsibility for both investments and implementation among the many actors who play a part in migration, *including civil society and the private sector*. And as with all important negotiations, the effectiveness of *all* mechanisms hinges upon the quality, dedication, imagination, genuine will to cooperate, *and the authority to make decisions* of the people around the table. This is both a question of legitimacy and efficacy. Legitimate representatives must be at the table, as must participants with the authority, will, and the means to make and carry out decisions. This is what marks the evolution from an “empty-shell” process to one that is meaningful and



makes a real difference on the ground. Hence, if the goal of all this international activism is to insert ideas into policy, there need to be people in the room capable of taking ideas from meetings and putting them into play. And even then, real progress can be made only when international challenges can be framed through the lens of national goals by decisionmakers and key stakeholders.

VI. By Way of a Conclusion, Three Simple Ideas Worth Repeating

Start small, build up, and learn by doing. Creating a roadmap to deal with complex transnational challenges needs to be seeded by agreements among small groups of states — a strategy some have dubbed “minilateralism.” Bilateral cooperation on discrete, practical issues is a natural starting point in that it allows governments to model successful processes and gradually gain momentum (and public support) for spurring collective action. Once states are able to demonstrate they can negotiate, compromise, and hold each other accountable on small issues, virtuous cycles can ensue whereby others might be motivated to join.

This is also the most effective political strategy. Publics will be skeptical of grand bargains that have not been proven or that appear to benefit foreigners over natives. It is more than clear that there is no political will at this time to pursue ambitious bilateral and multilateral cooperative agendas, let alone develop “comprehensive” approaches, without first demonstrating the benefits of international cooperation on migration in small and concrete ways.

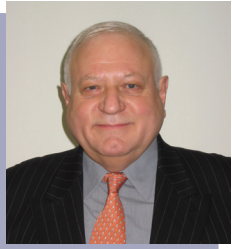
Gradually convert habits of working together into more formal collaboration. Building trust is in itself an important outcome of mechanisms of international cooperation (albeit one that is hard to measure). Once habits of cooperation become ingrained, more formal mechanisms and processes can be introduced. Organic, grassroots cooperation among states — and between states and nonstate actors — can then grow into something more formal.

Engage new actors in creative ways. Governments should think outside the box about how to engage nonstate actors. For example, employers have clear incentives to invest in training, building workforces and thus replenishing the talent pool; they also have the knowledge and resources that governments typically lack. States should be open-minded and creative in considering who their allies can be in the development and implementation of policy — and migration may be a good area for doing so.

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