

Migration Outlook report: Electoral promises and quick fixes, asylum offshoring, and labour migration's coming of age

Vienna, 17 January 2024: In a year full of European, national, and regional elections, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) expects migration to be a pivotal topic. While many governments implement quick fixes ahead of their electoral cycles, opposition parties are tying their campaigns to migration-related promises. ICMPD's 2024 Migration Outlook report forecasts record displacement levels resulting from war and conflict, leading to a further securitization of migration and offshoring of asylum procedures, as well as a rise in secondary movements. These developments are taking place while labour migration is 'coming of age' in Europe.

Last year, global migration trends saw an alarming surge in displacement, reaching a record number of 114 million due to escalating armed conflicts and heightened geopolitical tension. Preliminary data saw a 21.2% increase in EU asylum applications, indicating one million claims at the end of the year – the highest number since 2016 – foreshadowing an equally challenging situation in 2024.

Geopolitical dynamics had a significant impact on migration in 2023: military coups in Africa led to a rise in the irregular flow of migrants, which led to further EU external cooperation on migration. Domestic concerns led to a further securitization of migration in many of the world's regions, for instance through widened repatriation and expulsion policies in countries like Pakistan, Iran, Algeria, and Tunisia. This trend is expected to continue in 2024 as well, affecting hundreds of thousands of people and raising the potential for secondary migration flows.

The report also highlights other important dimensions of migration, including the 'coming of age' of labour migration in Europe, which will take on additional speed in 2024. It outlines related developments in Europe and the European Union, such as the EU Talent Pool, migration and mobility partnerships and a wide array of measures supporting the recruitment of skilled labour from outside the EU. Finally, the report depicts 2024 as a pivotal year for the economic integration of Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection in the EU. ICMPD Director General Michael Spindelegger: "This year, every EU country should achieve a formal employment rate of Ukrainian refugees of at least 50%. Next year, two-thirds should be employed in total and – taking our most pressing labour market needs into account – half of them should find their way into the health sector."

Additionally, the report investigates the debate on 'asylum offshoring', the external processing of asylum claims, which gained traction in the EU in 2023, with initiatives like the agreement between Italy and Albania and cooperation initiatives with Rwanda. In this regard, it also underscores the potential effectiveness of visa policies as a tool to curb irregular migration, as demonstrated by the notable decrease in asylum applicants following the abolishment of visa-free entry to Serbia.

ICMPD invites policymakers, migration stakeholders and the public to consider, and more importantly, to discuss the presented facts and arguments, emphasising the need for cooperative and informed responses to address the multifaceted challenges presented by the dynamic global migration environment.

The report forecasts ten migration issues to look out for in 2024:

1. New record displacement levels due to war and conflict
2. The intertwining of geopolitics and migration
3. A further securitization of migration
4. A rise in secondary movements
5. A growing number of migrants in countries in crisis
6. Migration's pivotal role on election campaigns
7. The EU's emphasis on external processing of asylum
8. Labour migration's 'coming of age' in Europe
9. The economic integration of Ukrainians under temporary protection
10. Changes to EU visa policy to reduce irregular arrivals

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About ICMPD

The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) is an international organisation with 20 Member States and more than 500 staff members. Active in more than 90 countries worldwide, it takes a regional approach in its work to create efficient cooperation and partnerships along migration routes. Priority regions include Africa, Central and South Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Its three-pillar approach to migration management - structurally linking research, migration dialogues and capacity building – contributes to better migration policy development worldwide. The Vienna-based organisation has a mission in Brussels, a regional office in Malta and project offices in several countries. ICMPD receives funding from its Member States, the European Commission, the UN, and other multilateral institutions, as well as bilateral donors. Founded in 1993, ICMPD holds UN observer status and cooperates with more than 700 partners including EU institutions and UN agencies.