

Vienna Migration Conference 2024

Closing Remarks

Vienna, 23 October 2024

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear chairs and panellists, friends and colleagues,

Like every year, it is my final duty to close the agenda and deliver the concluding remarks of the 2024 Vienna Migration Conference. And like every year, this is not an easy task after two days of excellent discussions and outstanding contributions.

We met at a time of increasing pressure on the global rules-based order, at a time of heated debates on migration and at a time of growing urgency for effective solutions in the area of migration governance. Against this backdrop, one might have expected our speakers to present a largely pessimistic outlook on how to address the situation. However, rather the opposite was the case. Their contributions were marked by realism, but also by a sense of optimism, confidence, and a strong belief that the global migration community is capable of meeting the existing challenges with convincing and workable solutions.

In the areas of migration governance and cooperation, profound change is happening, it is happening faster than many might have anticipated, and it is yielding more positive outcomes than many might be aware of. Let me share a few conclusions from today and yesterday that might support this assumption.

- For years, there were serious doubts on whether the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum would ever be agreed. Today, it is adopted, it is perceived as a mechanism that delivers in the EU context, and it is seen as a tool that allows the EU to speak with one voice with its partners around the world. And although some reservations remain, the majority of Member States is fully committed to the Pact, wants to speed up its implementation and develop new ideas that would take it even further.
- Until recently, migration partnerships were frequently debated, but seldomly put into practice. Also, this has changed significantly. Yesterday, we discussed the recent Strategic Partnership between Egypt and the EU, an example for a concrete and far-reaching migration partnership. And we could have discussed many other agreements that follow a similar concept and were concluded in the course of the last two years.
- Change is also happening in the area of international protection. The so called “route-based-approach” provides a broad set of measures for people in need in countries of origin, countries of first asylum, transit countries and final destinations. It is strongly supported by UNHCR Member States but also by the private sector in terms of labour matching schemes and by international actors in terms of investment and financial support. Since 2018, the World Bank has mobilised almost 6 billion Euros in first countries of asylum to provide refugees with access to health, education and livelihoods. Also this is a remarkable development.

- Last but not least, it would not be the VMC if we did not conclude with a view on the developments and the progress in the area of labour migration. We have learned about the great investments made by States and by the private sector. Our friends from Pakistan and Bangladesh have told us about their strategies and policies ranging from skills development to supporting workers via migrant resource centres, pre-departure training and post-arrival assistance. Meaningful partnerships with European countries have been agreed, and the vision that orderly labour migration becomes a driver for development and prosperity for all sides involved has started to become a reality.

There were many more excellent contributions to the debate, ranging from external processing of asylum claims to the important question of our preparedness to deal with unexpected events and the link between new technology and migration. I do not want to take more time now. But I want to assure you that none of the contributions made at this conference will be lost. Like for previous editions of the VMC, we will compile them in a conference report and share the report with you.

In view of this fairly positive summary, allow me a final remark. We all should seek every opportunity to discuss our policies with our citizens, to explain what we do and why we do it, to present our plans, our achievements and the areas that need further action. If we succeed on this task, we will also gain more acceptance for our actions and for migration as a whole.

All that is left for me now is to thank once more our hosts and supporters, the Organisation for Refugee Services – ORS, Fragomen and the City of Vienna. Once more, I would like to express my gratitude to all our presenters, panellists, and discussants for sharing their ideas and insights with us. A special thank you has to go to my colleagues who made this event possible. First of all, a special thank you to our outgoing Deputy Director General, Lukas Gehrke, who after more than twenty years of service for the ICMPD will leave us by the end of the month to seek out new adventures. Lukas, you have left your mark on the format of the VMC and, even more so, on the organisation as it stands today. On behalf of all ICMPD colleagues I want to sincerely thank you for that. Of course, I want to thank Malin once more for her leadership in organising this year's conference, and the entire team who worked day and night to make it happen.

On this note I want to end – to those who still have to travel today, I wish you a safe journey; to those who stay on, enjoy the city of Vienna; to all of you, have a nice afternoon and evening and thank you very much. I hope that you will enjoy the lunch that concludes the conference and hope to see all of you again at the Vienna Migration Conference 2025.

Thank you.