



Progress in the Promotion of the International Governance of Migrations

*by Laura Thompson**

Migration will continue to be one of the political, socio-economic and humanitarian topics at the top of countries' agendas, both at national and international level, throughout the rest of the twenty-first century.

Balanced management of migration has therefore become one of the most complex aims of governmental management, as it requires the participation and coordination of a large number of governmental bodies with different, sometimes even conflicting, priorities. It also goes right to the heart of the relationship of the State with its citizens, national identity and the view we hold of the type of society in which we want to live and raise future generations.

Although the management of migration, because of its international nature, requires the participation of two or more countries, States still have a high level of autonomy and sovereignty to define their migration policies, and many are very concerned to maintain this total autonomy.

Similarly, the lack of any multilateral institutional framework that is formal and consistent to help manage migration, created from the top down, has generated a bottom-up approach of *ad-hoc* rules and informal agreements which States adhere to selectively, taking part in different processes and at different levels. Similarly, various international organisations with responsibilities for cross-cutting issues such as human rights, health, employment, security, climate change, etc., have incorporated specific aspects of migration into their agendas and the regulations they draw up, some of a binding nature.

This has resulted in the creation of a complex and heterogenous system of procedures, standards and bodies working on matters related to migration at global, regional and sub-regional level, in parallel and in a disconnected way, as well as regulations that sometimes lack a holistic and integrated view of the complexity of the migratory phenomenon.

Against this background, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has a broad and varied mandate in matters related to migration, and it has wide experience and considerable presence at global level in all areas of the field of migration. Although the IOM promotes the implementation of and respect for existing global and regional legal instruments for the rights of migrants, it is not mandated to create international regulations or standards of a binding nature.

Nevertheless, over recent years some political developments in the multilateral arena have revealed a major evolution in the international debate on migration.

In the first place, the including of Migration as a specific goal in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of 2015 (10.7): “Facilitating the migration and mobility of people that is orderly, safe, steady and responsible, through, among other things, the application of planned and well monitored migration policies”. In this way, migration is for the first time becoming part of the main remit of global development policies.

The Sustainable Development Agenda goes still further, incorporating migration and migrants within other objectives and goals, and also including in these the impact of humanitarian crises and forced displacement on development; the need to empower vulnerable groups; the eradication of bonded labour, human trafficking and child labour; and the reduction of transaction costs for remittances, among other things.

In this way, the inclusion of migrants becomes a cross-cutting issue to ensure the fulfilment of one of the central objectives of the 2015-2030 agenda, that is, that sustainable development should benefit all “without leaving anyone behind”, and it reflects the recognition that migration favours development in both the country of origin and the destination country.

Other major policy advances are the inclusion of migration and human displacement in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and a recognition that migration can be a measure for the prevention of, or a response or adaptation to these changes; as in the Sendai Framework for the Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

However, the most important progress took place on 19 September 2016 with the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants being adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. This Declaration proposes a more integrated, predictable and sustainable response to forced displacement, as well as a system of governance for international migration.

In this Declaration, 193 Heads of State and Government made the following statements, among others:

- They reiterate the commitment of the international community to the rights and protection of refugees and migrants;
- They recognise a shared responsibility for managing large movements of refugees and migrants in a humane, sensitive, compassionate and people-centred manner;
- They commit to tackling the causes of these huge population movements;

- They condemn acts and displays of racism, discrimination and xenophobia against refugees and migrants, and the stereotypes with which they are often associated; and
- They have decided to strengthen the global governance of migration by incorporating the United Nations system into the IOM.

The New York Declaration also includes concrete plans to initiate negotiations leading to the development of Global Pacts, one on refugees and another on migration. The Global Pact for safe, steady and orderly migration will be approved at an international conference in 2018.

The agreement to progress towards this integrated framework is a momentous one as it implies that migration, like other spheres of international relations, will be structured by a set of common principles and approaches. However, this integrated framework is not starting from zero. We now have a series of regulations and principles relating to human rights and labour standards which must compulsorily be applied and which do not distinguish between nationals and foreigners, independently of the administrative migration situation in which a country finds itself.

But above all, this Global Pact offers a unique historic opportunity to establish the principles and commitments of the international community towards an integrated approach to migration that includes its humanitarian, development, human rights, climate change and peace and security dimensions.

This is an opportunity which, in my opinion, we must seize with both hands!

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