MIGRATION POLICY PRACTICE

Connecting migration research, policy and practice worldwide

ISSN 2223-5248

Vol. XV, Number 1, April 2026



CONTENTS

2 **Foreword**

3 **Introduction: Migration governance at a critical crossroads: Insights for the Second International Migration Review Forum**
Pablo Rojas Coppari, Jenna Nassiri and Micaela Lincango

5 **Artificial intelligence as a new frontier in migration governance: The missing piece in the Global Compact for Migration**
Alina Narusova-Schmitz

12 **Hold the line: Countering backsliding on gender ahead of the 2026 International Migration Review Forum and beyond**
Jenna Hennebry, Varinia Salazar-Barrientos, Paola Cyment and Carolina Gottardo

17 **Gender aspects in migration and return: Women's experiences in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan**
Caterina Francesca Guidi, Vivianne van der Vorst and Ivona Zakoska-Todorovska

23 **Innovative pathways to migrant regularization: Lessons from the Opportunity Residence Permit of Germany**
Zeynep Yanaşmayan and Pau Palop-García

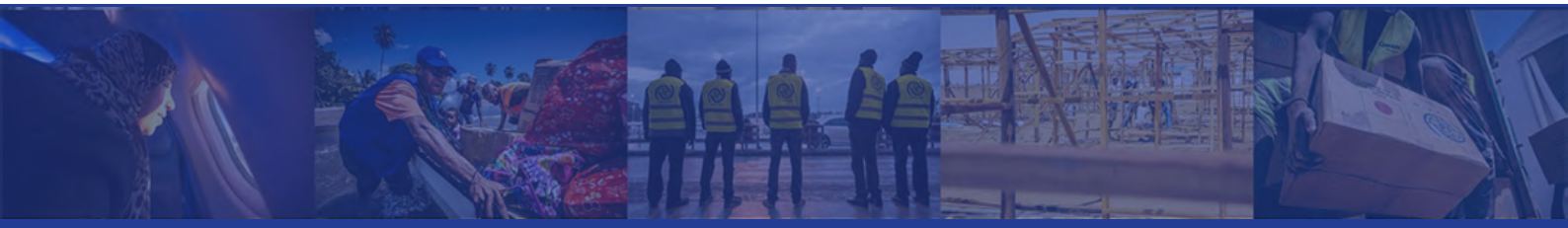
30 **IOM and private sector solutions for human rights due diligence to support the World Economic Forum's Global Data Partnership against Forced Labour**
Hélène Syed Zwick, Maximilian Pottler and Camila Kirtzman (IOM Thailand)

36 **Regularizing Venezuelans in the Andes: Lessons in design and implementation**
Alessandra Enrico

43 **Pathway promises and policy realities: Lessons from the International Student Reset of Canada**
Lisa Ruth Brunner and Dhriti Mehta

51 **Streamlining migrant integration in Peru: The one-stop shop model of public–private Migracentros (2023–2026)**
Nancy Helena Arellano Suárez and Luisa Feline Freier

59 **Beyond aid: The enduring role of diasporas across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus**
Fabrizia Camplone and Anna Valtolina



IOM UN MIGRATION

Foreword

In unprecedented times, evidence and data show what makes migration governance effective. While proven tools exist – including targeted protection mechanisms, labour mobility frameworks and coordinated platforms – political will and sustained investment remain critical gaps. As collective responses become both more necessary and more challenging, sustaining spaces for informed dialogue and evidence-based policymaking is essential. It is in this context, and in the lead-up to the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) – the principal intergovernmental platform for reviewing progress on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration – that I am pleased to introduce this special issue of the *Migration Policy Practice* (MPP). As the international community prepares to take stock of achievements, identify persistent gaps and define priorities for the years ahead, the contributions brought together in this issue offer timely and policy-relevant insights to support these discussions.

The continuation of the journal reflects the enduring commitment of IOM to bridging research, policy and practice, as well as to fostering inclusive, globally representative knowledge that informs decision-making at all levels. By amplifying diverse perspectives and grounded analysis, MPP contributes to strengthening the evidence base needed to navigate an increasingly complex migration landscape, and reinforces the value of multilateral, whole-of-society approaches.

I would like to extend my appreciation to the new MPP editorial team for their leadership and dedication, as well as to the Editorial Committee and all contributors whose work enriches this issue. Their efforts exemplify the collaborative spirit that underpins effective migration governance. I trust that this special issue will serve as a valuable resource for those engaging in the IMRF and help inform a forward-looking and constructive outcome.

Ugochi Daniels
Deputy Director General for Operations, IOM

Introduction: Migration governance at a critical crossroads: Insights for the Second International Migration Review Forum

Pablo Rojas Coppari, Jenna Nassiri and Micaela Lincango[1]

Migration governance stands at a decisive juncture. Funding cuts to the humanitarian sector, coupled with mounting pressures on multilateralism amid ongoing geopolitical tensions, are straining the broader United Nations system and migration-focused organizations in particular. In this context, the decision to continue publishing *Migration Policy Practice* (MPP) reflects the recognition of IOM that supporting migration scholarship can contribute to finding answers to these challenges. Guided by a new Editorial Board and Editorial Committee, MPP remains committed to publishing high-quality research, including from diverse geographies and early career researchers, thereby contributing to dialogue and innovative approaches to policymaking.

Through this special issue, we aim to support and inform the second International Migration Review Forum (IMRF), featuring articles aligned with the objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (Global Compact for Migration). The first IMRF, held in May 2022, established the precedent for this State-led, four-year review mechanism mandated by the Global Compact for Migration. It brought together governments, international organizations, civil society, the private sector and migrant communities to evaluate early implementation efforts and chart a course for the Compact's operationalization.

Four years on, the migration landscape has further evolved, introducing new dynamics while amplifying persistent challenges. Technological advances, for instance, have enhanced coordination in humanitarian aid delivery, yet they also expose vulnerable populations to new risks that governance frameworks have not yet adequately addressed. Regularization pathways have expanded in some regions, while in others, irregular status remains a persistent barrier to protection and integration. The current political climate poses challenges to advancing and operationalizing gender-responsive migration policies and practices. Key actors, such as diaspora communities, continue to play vital yet underrecognized roles across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. Meanwhile, private sector engagement in innovative migration governance solutions is now more critical than ever. Together, these interconnected developments highlight the complexity of delivering on the Global Compact for Migration's guiding vision.

Against this backdrop, this issue brings together contributions from practitioners, researchers, international organizations and civil society actors, each offering timely analysis, grounded reflections and actionable recommendations. Topics include the following: (a) the role of artificial intelligence in migration governance

[1] Pablo Rojas Coppari, IOM; Jenna Nassiri, York University; and Micaela Lincango, IOM.

(Narusova-Schmitz) (Objectives 1, 3, 11, 12 and 17); (b) gender-responsive implementation of the Global Compact for Migration (Hennebry et al.) (Objectives 7, 16 and 17); (c) women's migration and return experiences in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Guidi et al.) (Objectives 4, 7, 16 and 21); (d) private sector solutions for human rights due diligence (Syed Zwick et al.) (Objectives 6, 17 and 23); (e) innovative pathways to regularization in Germany (Yanaşmayan and Palop-García) (Objectives 5 and 12); (f) the regularization of Venezuelans in the Andes (Enrico) (Objectives 5, 15 and 16); (g) lessons from the international student pathways of Canada (Brunner and Mehta) (Objectives 5 and 18); (h) integrated service models for migrant inclusion in Peru (Arellano Suárez and Freier) (Objectives 4, 15 and 16); and (i) the enduring role of diasporas across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus (Camplone and Valtolina) (Objectives 19, 20 and 23).

As the principal intergovernmental platform for reviewing the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration, IMRF offers a pivotal opportunity for the global community to take stock, recalibrate and renew its collective resolve. It provides a structured space for migration actors to assess achievements, identify gaps, exchange promising practices and articulate forward-looking commitments through the Progress Declaration. This issue therefore aims to serve as a resource for policymakers, practitioners and advocates as they prepare for the discussions that will shape the Progress Declaration and define the next chapter of global migration cooperation.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Pablo, Jenna and Micaela

Vol. XV, Number 1, April 2026
MIGRATION POLICY PRACTICE 5

Artificial intelligence as a new frontier in migration governance: The missing piece in the Global Compact for Migration

Alina Narusova-Schmitz[1]

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer peripheral to migration governance. It is increasingly embedded across the migration cycle, including in border and identity systems, visa and asylum processing, labour recruitment and matching, migration data analysis and service delivery. AI is also reshaping the information environment that influences migration policy, expanding communication opportunities while, at the same time, amplifying risks of mis- and disinformation.[2]

Policy and regulatory frameworks, however, have struggled to keep pace with AI deployment, creating governance gaps. While some migration-specific regulations are emerging at national and regional levels, they remain uneven. At the global level, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (the Global Compact) provides a shared vision for comprehensive migration governance, yet it does not reference AI.[3] This omission is increasingly significant, as AI is already affecting the implementation, follow-up and review of the Global Compact.

At the same time, AI governance is accelerating globally. National and regional regulations are multiplying, and international processes – including the United Nations General Assembly resolution on safe, secure and trustworthy AI systems and follow-up mechanisms under the Global Digital Compact – are establishing new coordination structures. However, these efforts remain largely disconnected from migration governance discussions, even though some regulatory frameworks classify certain AI applications in migration, asylum and border management as high risk.[4]

Bridging this gap is increasingly urgent. The International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) in 2026 offers a timely opportunity to begin structured reflection on how AI is reshaping migration systems, and to ensure that its integration aligns with the agreed vision of safe, orderly and regular migration, while linking migration governance to the emerging global AI architecture.

[1] Alina Narusova-Schmitz is a migration policy, governance and strategy expert with two decades of experience at IOM, working across global and regional levels, and advancing multilateral cooperation, including support to the Global Compact for Migration negotiations. Her expertise includes policy development across multiple areas, government advisory support, migration governance and capacity development. She is currently an independent consultant specializing in policy analysis, strategic advice, capacity development and stakeholder engagement.

[2] Ana Beduschi and Marie McAuliffe, "Artificial intelligence, migration and mobility: Implications for policy and practice" in *World Migration Report 2022* (M. McAuliffe and A. Triandafyllidou, eds.) (Geneva, IOM, 2021); Ana Beduschi, "Responsible artificial intelligence in international migration management", *Migration Policy Practice*, XIV(2):44–51 (2025).

[3] United Nations General Assembly resolution 73/195 on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (19 December 2018), paras. 6–7.

[4] United Nations General Assembly resolution 78/265 on Seizing the opportunities of safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems for sustainable development (21 March 2024); United Nations General Assembly resolution 79/325 on the Terms of reference and modalities for the establishment and functioning of the Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence and the Global Dialogue on Artificial Intelligence Governance (26 August 2025). See, for example, the European Union Artificial Intelligence Act's classification of certain AI systems in migration, asylum and border control management as high-risk and related analyses of high-stakes migration applications (European Union, Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 on laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Artificial Intelligence Act) (13 June 2024)).

Artificial intelligence in migration contexts

AI in migration is best understood not as a single tool but as a suite of machine-based systems that use data to generate outputs – such as predictions, recommendations or decisions – with varying levels of autonomy. Key frameworks, including those of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union, also note that AI systems may adapt after deployment and pursue explicit or implicit objectives.[5]

Across the migration cycle, AI is increasingly used in operational decision support and administrative workflows. It also shapes public perceptions and narratives by enabling large-scale content generation, translation, targeting and amplification. These developments can affect social cohesion and the political space for evidence-based policymaking.

There is no comprehensive global inventory of how States apply AI across migration systems; existing analyses provide general overviews or focus on particular regions and functions. Table 1 provides an illustrative overview of AI application across migration systems and the governance issues these raise. The cross-cutting risks and challenges of such AI usage are discussed in the next section.

Table 1. Snapshot of artificial intelligence use in migration systems

Functional areas (non-exhaustive)	Examples of artificial intelligence application	Main reasons for adoption	Key risks and sensitivities
Migration data, analysis and policy narratives	• Forecasting models • Trend analysis • Early warning systems • Automated data dashboards • AI-assisted policy summaries and reporting	• Improve preparedness • Support planning and budgeting • Synthesize large data volumes • Inform decision makers • Support public information	• Forecasts are inherently uncertain. • Uncertainty may be under-communicated to decision makers. • Model assumptions may shape policy framing. • Selective indicators can influence political narratives. • This has the potential to distort the migration evidence base and public understanding.
Border and identity systems	• Biometric matching for identity verification • Anomaly detection in passenger/border flows • Risk scoring to prioritize screening	• Manage high volumes • Increase speed and automation • Improve security and fraud detection • Optimize use of resources	• Individuals have limited ability to challenge decisions. • Biometric errors can produce disparate impacts. • Interoperability can propagate errors.

[5] OECD, Recommendation of the Council on Artificial Intelligence (OECD/LEGAL/0449) (22 May 2019); Beduschi and McAuliffe, 2021; European Union, 2024; and United Nations, 2024.

Functional areas (non-exhaustive)	Examples of artificial intelligence application	Main reasons for adoption	Key risks and sensitivities
Visas/asylum/ returns	• Case triage and prioritization • Document consistency checks and fraud detection • Decision-support tools, including predictive analytics to flag absconding risk or prioritize enforcement and case management	• Reduce backlog • Improve consistency • Target scarce resources • Respond to political demand for faster decisions	• These systems can have a direct impact on an individual's status, liberty and protection. • There are concerns regarding due process and explainability. • There is a risk of over-reliance on automated outputs.
Enforcement and compliance monitoring	• Risk scoring to prioritize inspections • Overstay detection systems • Analytics to identify irregular status • Tools supporting detention or removal prioritization	• Target limited enforcement resources • Increase compliance • Respond to political pressure	• There is a risk of discriminatory or disproportionate enforcement. • These can undermine privacy and due process safeguards.
Labour recruitment/ matching	• Automated candidate screening and skills matching • Credential verification support • Job-candidate matching platforms • Detection of anomalous recruitment patterns	• Address labour shortages • Enable faster matching • Reduce administrative burden • Improve compliance monitoring	• There is a potential to reproduce labour-market discrimination. • Some ranking processes remain opaque. • These systems involve extensive personal data processing across borders.
Migrant services/ integration	• Multilingual chatbots for information and referrals • Targeted outreach based on needs profiling • Analytics to optimize service delivery and integration support	• Improve accessibility • Reduce transaction costs • Scale service delivery • Support integration outcomes	• There are profiling and privacy concerns. • There are uneven digital literacy and access. • There is a risk of exclusion from essential services.

Note: The above examples are indicative and non-exhaustive; adoption, maturity and safeguards vary widely across contexts.
Sources: Table is compiled based on the following sources: Beduschi and McAuliffe, 2021; OECD, 2019; Petra Molnar, "Artificial intelligence in migration management: Opportunities, challenges, and risks", Federal Agency for Civic Education (4 September 2025); and Francesca Diaz, Georgia Ross, Tamiliniyaa Rangarajan and Wael Frikha, Leveraging the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into border management systems: A best practices report (IOM and Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, 2025).

Across these and other migration domains, governments cite similar motivations for adopting AI: managing increasing mobility volumes, enhancing security and fraud detection, reducing backlogs and costs, and responding to political demands for faster decisions. Automated tools are also introduced with the expectation that they will standardize decision-making and reduce variation associated with workload pressures or human error.[6] These considerations help explain the rapid integration of AI across multiple migration areas. However, the governance implications differ depending on the extent to which systems influence legal status, liberty and access to protection.

The breadth of AI deployment means that it affects implementation of the Global Compact as a whole, with the most evident implications for objectives related to migration data and evidence (Objective 1); access to accurate information (Objective 3); addressing vulnerabilities in migration (Objective 7); procedures for appropriate screening, assessment and referral (Objective 12); and eliminating discrimination and promoting evidence-based public discourse (Objective 17).

As AI becomes embedded in high-impact decisions, transparency, oversight, accountability and rights safeguards become increasingly central.

Artificial intelligence in migration governance: Core risks and governance challenges

The integration of AI into migration governance is fraught with the same challenges in other public sectors, including opacity, bias and concerns related to privacy and accountability. However, these challenges are often amplified in migration and asylum contexts, where decisions can have high-impact and potentially irreversible consequences affecting legal status, liberty and access to protection. Individuals involved may also face significant barriers, including limited legal support or capacity to challenge administrative outcomes. For this reason, several regulatory frameworks classify certain AI applications in migration, asylum and border management as high risk. Some of the major AI-related risks and challenges are outlined as follows.[7]

Opacity and automation bias

The black-box problem – the difficulty of understanding how AI systems produce outputs – creates significant due process concerns. When an AI-enabled system flags a case as high-risk or influences prioritization, applicants may be unable to understand why a decision was taken or how to challenge it effectively, raising due process issues relevant to Global Compact commitments. Opacity also presents a risk of policy inertia: systems built on historical data and embedded design choices may not adapt easily to evolving legal standards or policy priorities.

[6] Beduschi and McAuliffe, 2021; Diaz et al., 2025; Petra Molnar, Technological testing grounds: Migration management experiments and reflections from the ground up (European Digital Rights and Refugee Law Lab, 2020); and Petra Molnar and Lex Gill, Bots at the gate: A human rights analysis of automated decision-making in Canada's immigration and refugee system (International Human Rights Program and the Citizen Lab, 2018).

[7] Key sources discussing AI-related risks and ways to address them include the following: Beduschi and McAuliffe, 2021; Diaz et al., 2025; Molnar, 2025; Molnar and Gill, 2018; OECD, 2019; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and University of Essex, Digital border governance: A human rights-based approach (September 2023); and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR AI approach (August 2025).

Human oversight is frequently proposed as a safeguard. Yet research on automation bias shows that officials may defer to algorithmic outputs, particularly under time pressure or heavy caseloads. When this occurs, review may become procedural rather than substantive. As AI is embedded across multiple stages of migration-related decision-making, black-box dynamics and deference to automated outputs can have cumulative effects.

Bias and discrimination

AI systems reflect the data and assumptions embedded in their design and training. In migration contexts, this creates risks of unequal impacts across groups. Biometric systems, for example, have demonstrated uneven performance across demographic groups, potentially leading to erroneous matches, heightened scrutiny or detention. More broadly, tools trained on historical administrative data may reproduce existing enforcement patterns, even when relying on seemingly neutral indicators. Without robust testing, monitoring and independent oversight, AI can exacerbate unequal treatment and undermine commitments to non-discrimination and rights-based approaches reflected in the Global Compact.

Interoperability, cascading error and function creep

Migration governance increasingly relies on interconnected databases and cross-border information-sharing. As systems become more integrated, errors can spread across platforms and become difficult to detect or correct. Interoperability also raises the risk of function creep, whereby data collected for one purpose – such as service delivery or registration – are repurposed for enforcement.

Exacerbating factors: Vendor dependence and uneven capacity

These governance challenges are compounded by institutional capacity constraints. Migration authorities often rely on external vendors for system design and maintenance and may lack the technical capacity required for effective oversight and auditing. Globally, regulatory capacity varies widely; in lower-capacity settings, AI systems may be adopted without adequate safeguards.

Managing these risks is essential if AI is to support good migration governance. The next section maps the multilayered and fragmented governance landscape, situating migration-specific approaches alongside the rapidly evolving global AI governance architecture.

State of play: A multilayered and fragmented governance landscape

In response to expanding AI use in migration systems, a patchwork of governance approaches is emerging, ranging from binding regulation to soft-law guidance. While these initiatives strengthen accountability, their uneven development risks deepening fragmentation in a cross-border setting.

Emerging artificial intelligence governance in migration contexts

Migration-relevant frameworks can be grouped into three approaches.[8]

First, a risk-based regulatory approach, mostly developed in Europe and parts of North America, applies tiered safeguards based on the potential impact of AI systems. The European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act is the most advanced example, classifying certain AI uses in migration, asylum and border management as high risk and requiring safeguards such as human oversight, documentation and monitoring, while prohibiting practices deemed incompatible with fundamental rights. Complementary instruments, such as the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, reinforce requirements for impact assessment and accountability.

Second, an innovation-first model is applied in the Gulf region. It relies primarily on voluntary compliance and ethical self-regulation by developers and State agencies, emphasizing innovation over precautionary restrictions. The Guiding Manual on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence Use for Gulf Cooperation Council member States illustrates this approach, promoting trustworthy AI principles across sectors, including those relevant to migration. While not migration-specific, it is relevant to migration governance.

Third, an equity- and inclusion-centred model, reflected in the African Union's Continental AI Strategy, emphasizes responsible and inclusive AI and highlights the need to avoid systems that exacerbate exclusion or discrimination. Although not binding like the European Union framework, it sets a strong normative standard and explicitly links AI governance to the protection of vulnerable populations.

Across these approaches, common elements include risk-tiering, impact assessments and documentation requirements. However, mechanisms to connect them are limited, and levels of enforceability and institutional capacity vary considerably.

Global artificial intelligence governance: The evolving international architecture

In parallel, global AI governance is consolidating through sector-neutral overarching principles and coordination mechanisms for "safe, secure and trustworthy" AI.[9] The Group of 7 (G7) Hiroshima AI Process has advanced voluntary guiding principles and a code of conduct for organizations developing advanced AI systems, emphasizing safety, security and trustworthiness. The United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/78/265 reinforces a global expectation that AI should be safe, secure and trustworthy and aligned with sustainable development and human rights. The Global Digital Compact establishes two standing mechanisms to strengthen the science–policy interface and

[8] Instruments and frameworks mentioned in this section are as follows: Artificial Intelligence Act (European Union, 2024); Council of Europe, Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law (Vilnius, Council of Europe, 2024); Gulf Cooperation Council, Guiding Manual on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence Use in Member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (2023); and African Union, Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy: Harnessing AI for Africa's development and prosperity (2024).

[9] Frameworks mentioned in this section are as follows: G7, Hiroshima Process International Guiding Principles for Organizations Developing Advanced AI System (2023), and Hiroshima Process International Code of Conduct for Organizations Developing Advanced AI Systems (2023), adopted under the Hiroshima AI Process, G7; United Nations, 2024; Annex 1: Global Digital Compact in United Nations General Assembly resolution 79/1 on the Pact for the Future (22 September 2024); and United Nations, 2025.

international cooperation on AI governance: the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI and the Global Dialogue on AI Governance.

Thus far, migration has remained peripheral in global AI governance discussions. As a result, migration-relevant AI governance is developing through parallel tracks: uneven migration-specific approaches at national and regional levels, and a fast-evolving global AI architecture that remains largely sector-neutral.

Connecting the dots: Leveraging artificial intelligence for good governance of migration

AI governance is rapidly establishing cross-sector guardrails for digital systems. At the same time, migration governance must ensure that one of the most politically sensitive and operationally complex areas of public policy is managed in a sound and rights-based manner. These debates have largely evolved in parallel. Bringing them into closer alignment is essential.

As AI becomes integrated into migration systems, structured reflection on its implications is increasingly relevant to the implementation, follow-up and review of the Global Compact. The recent report of the Secretary-General highlights the importance of digital transformation in migration governance and the establishment of standards for technology use.[10] The next step is to translate this recognition into sustained dialogue on how AI is reshaping migration systems in practice.

The rapid spread of AI across migration systems, combined with divergent regional and national approaches, creates an urgent need to connect existing initiatives and avoid further fragmentation in a fast-moving space. The Global Compact provides a shared reference point for this effort. Its holistic vision of good migration governance sets out agreed principles – most notably a people-centred approach, human rights, the rule of law and due process – against which AI applications can be assessed, along with Global Compact commitments to evidence-based policymaking, transparency, accountability and non-discrimination. At the same time, migration-focused discussions should be linked to the broader global AI governance architecture. The Scientific Panel and Global Dialogue established under the Global Digital Compact create an opportunity to connect migration governance to emerging global AI coordination mechanisms.

The IMRF 2026 is a timely occasion to initiate regular exchange on AI in migration governance within the Global Compact framework and to identify pathways for systematic engagement with global AI processes. Strengthening these connections can help prevent fragmentation and ensure that migration is not overlooked in the evolving international AI governance landscape. Such synergy is essential to ensure that AI technologies support the Global Compact's ultimate goal: making migration safe, orderly and regular for the benefit of all.

[10] United Nations General Assembly, Report of the Secretary-General on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (A/80/632) (Advance unedited version) (10 February 2026), para. 95.

12 Vol. XV, Number 1, April 2026
MIGRATION POLICY PRACTICE

Hold the line: Countering backsliding on gender ahead of the 2026 International Migration Review Forum and beyond

Jenna Hennebry, Varinia Salazar-Barrientos, Paola Cyment and Carolina Gottardo[1]

Introduction

This is a pivotal moment in the global politics of migration. Mounting climate pressures, increased conflict, rapid technological change, growing populism and polarization resulting in the criminalization of migrants and migration are deepening inequalities worldwide. As governments navigate this new terrain, gender equality risks deprioritization. Despite the gains in protecting the human rights of women and LGBTIQ+ people over the last 30 years, the current moment is marked by significant backsliding, particularly with respect to migrants. Chronicling some key examples of progress alongside recent backsliding, this article reflects on the gender-responsive implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (Global Compact for Migration). It also makes the case for strengthening its gender-responsive infrastructure and bolstering the role of civil society to hold the line and not lose more ground on gender equality.

Mapping the gender-responsive infrastructure of the Global Compact for Migration

The Global Compact for Migration represents a landmark shift in migration governance by embedding gender responsiveness not as a secondary thought, but as a core guiding principle. Gender equality and women's rights are highlighted in the Global Compact for Migration, with more than 20 references throughout. This commitment is operationalized through the United Nations Network on Migration, which ensures that the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration's 23 objectives accounts for the specific realities of women, girls and gender-diverse individuals. In Marrakesh, the Women in Migration Network (WIMN) and global civil society partners developed the Marrakesh Manifesto, which echoed the call of civil society for feminist action on migration and gender responsiveness in the Global Compact 's implementation. The United Nations Network on Migration has enabled the participation of CSOs in the Global Compact for Migration implementation process, and facilitated dialogue and collaboration among CSOs, member States and United Nations agencies. CSOs and independent experts actively engaged in the United Nations Network on Migration have continued to call for gender-responsive and human-rights-based approaches to counter migration realities where gender negatively impacts the experiences of migrants, with

[1] Jenna Hennebry is a Professor at the Balsillie School of International Affairs and Co-Director of the International Migration Research Centre at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, Canada. She was among the founding members of the United Nations Expert Working Group on Women's Human Rights in the Global Compact in 2015. Varinia Salazar-Barrientos holds a master's degree in International Public Policy from Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, Canada. She collaborates on the Gender + Migration Hub. Paola Cyment is the Advocacy Lead of the Women in Migration Network (WIMN). She has been part of WIMN since 2015, both as an organizational representative and as an individual member. Carolina Gottardo is a feminist migrant woman and the Executive Director of the International Detention Coalition. She previously served as Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service Australia and the Latin American Women's Rights Service in the United Kingdom and is a board member of WIMN.

dangerous and deleterious consequences for women and LGBTIQ+ people.[2] This has been reinforced by high-level human rights reporting mechanisms, such as the Special Rapporteur specifically focused on migrant women's rights, which highlights the intersectional vulnerabilities and agency of women and provides the legal and normative basis for encouraging member States towards more ambitious reforms.

During the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) in May 2022, there was significant attention paid to gender responsiveness in both official proceedings and side events. Reference to "women" was generally commonplace in proceedings, with 26 references among member States and 10 in the Progress Declaration itself.[3] Denmark flagged the importance of improving gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights. Canada recognized the importance of a gender-responsive approach to migration. Canada and the Kingdom of the Netherlands both recognized the importance of gender-responsive policies, effectively widening the language around gender responsiveness to include LGBTIQ+ individuals. Further, Canada, Germany and WIMN made specific gender-responsive pledges.[4]

Following the IMRF (2022), work within the United Nations Network on Migration increased considerably, particularly due to the committed participation of CSOs in its working groups. This saw the creation of the Anti-Discrimination Workstream at the United Nations Network on Migration, which shepherded numerous gender-responsive initiatives to the fore, such as Policies and Practice: A Guide to Gender-Responsive Implementation of the Global Compact for Migration and the Gender-Responsiveness Integrated Training (GRIT) tool to build the capacity of stakeholders. Simultaneously, a Gender Marker was embedded into the Multi-Partner Trust Fund to track and incentivize projects that actively promote gender equality. In addition, the Global Compact for Migration Indicators included some key measures on gender responsiveness that are tied directly to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to international law. Together, these comprise the gender-responsive infrastructure[5] of the Global Compact for Migration that can hopefully withstand the backsliding under way.

[2] Elizabeth E. Ferris and Susan F. Martin, "The Global Compacts on Refugees and for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: Introduction to the special issue", *International Migration*, 57(6):5–18 (2019); Jenna Hennebry, "The global compact for migration: From gender-rhetoric to gender-responsive?", *Global Social Policy*, 18(3):332–338 (2018); Carolina Gottardo and Paola Cyment, "The Global Compact for Migration: what could it mean for women and gender relations?", *Gender & Development*, 27(1):67–83 (2019); WIMN, Marrakech Women's Rights Manifesto (2018).

[3] For example, "From pledges to practices: 'Actioning' and sustaining gender-responsiveness before, during and beyond migration crises" was hosted by Canada. See United Nations Network on Migration, From pledges to practices: 'Actioning' and sustaining gender-responsiveness before, during and beyond migration crises (New York, 2022); United Nations General Assembly resolution 76/266 on the Progress Declaration of the International Migration Review Forum (7 June 2022); United Nations, International Migration Review Forum 2022 – Plenary, General debate (continued), UN Web TV (19 May 2022).

[4] Canada pledged to promote and exchange gender-responsive migration programmes and policies, including the uptake of the Canada-funded Gender + Migration Hub. Germany pledged to mainstream gender, age and disability throughout humanitarian assistance, ending gender-based violence and strengthening gender responsiveness in the field of migration and forced displacement. See Gender + Migration Hub, Pledges made (19 May 2022).

[5] United Nations Network on Migration, Workstream 12: Enhancing the application of anti-discrimination dimensions, including discrimination based on gender into the work of the Network (n.d.); United Nations Network on Migration, Gender marker: Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund guidance note (Geneva, Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund, n.d.); United Nations Network on Migration, Limited set of indicators to review progress related to GCM implementation (n.d.).

Backsliding on gender responsiveness in a post-feminist foreign policy era

Backsliding on feminist policy, gender-responsive language and women's rights both within and beyond the domain of migration is pervasive, and it seems like almost overnight governments and agencies have become "afraid of gender"[6]. It is hard to imagine that just a few short years ago, feminist foreign policy (FFP) was gaining traction. Fast-forward from the IMRF in 2022 to 2026, many States are now hesitant to include *feminist* or *gender* in side events or statements. The norm of gender equality is being eroded, and we have moved into a new post-feminist era where anti-gender/anti-feminist rhetoric has become normalized, so that States and institutions who have long championed gender equality and proudly touted FFP are finding ways to avoid the F word.

Unfortunately, these changes have had a powerful push downhill from the actions taken by the current United States administration, from *Roe vs. Wade* (1973) being overturned in 2022, to a litany of executive orders taking aim at a range of gender equality and women's human rights measures. For example, protection for diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (also referred to as DEIA) had been removed, alongside major budgetary cuts for CSOs supporting women and LGBTIQ+ migrants.[7]

The actions of the United States Government have had global repercussions, with some United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations retracting gender-inclusive language due to concerns about funding, employment or negotiations, even among States that previously advanced gender equality and FFP.[8] In 2017, the Feminist International Assistance Policy of Canada, while not directly addressing migration, framed the country's engagement in the Global Compact for Migration negotiations and the 2022 IMRF, where Canada highlighted gender responsiveness in their public statements, sponsorship of side events and allocations of resources.[9] Despite this, Prime Minister Mark Carney signalled a significant departure from the Feminist International Assistance Policy and the broader FFP in November 2025, stating that the foreign policy of Canada is not necessarily feminist. The impact of this institutional-level shift in mandate remains to be seen, particularly with respect to their engagement in the United Nations Network on Migration and the IMRF.

The FFP of Mexico highlights feminist leaders and women's contributions, specifically Indigenous and Afro-Mexican women. While not directly addressing migration, the Comprehensive Care Policy for Women enhances right protection

[6] Judith Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender?* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2024).

[7] For example, President of the United States, Defending women from gender ideology extremism and restoring biological truth to the Federal Government, Washington, Executive Office of the President (20 January 2025). For a full list of executive orders, see: The White House, Executive orders (n.d.); and IOM, Update on IOM operations amid budget cuts, Global news (18 March 2025).

[8] See: United Nations Economic and Social Council, resolution 11(II) on the Commission on the Status of Women (21 June 1946); United Nations General Assembly resolution 34/180 on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (18 December 1979); and Resolution 54/4 on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (6 October 1999); the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (27 October 1995); Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls in United Nations General Assembly resolution 70/1 on Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (25 September 2015); International Labour Organization (ILO), C189 – Domestic Workers Convention (16 June 2011); ILO, ILO C190 – Violence and Harassment Convention (21 June 2019); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls (n.d.).

[9] Allison Petrozziello and Jenna Hennebry, "Making migration part of Canada's feminist foreign policy future", *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis*, 80(4):642–660 (2025); Government of Canada, Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (date modified 15 August 2025).

for Mexican immigrant women and girls,[10] but they tend to treat women and girls as a singular category and largely ignore gender diversity. Meanwhile, the FFP of Colombia specifically highlights the human rights of migrant women, safe and regular migration pathways, women's contributions to development and efforts to reduce the risk of human rights violations; however, even with its Chairship of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), Colombia has continued to face challenges in advancing feminist approaches. [11]

In Europe, Germany was one of the first countries to implement FFP, launching their Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy: Federal Foreign Office Guidelines in March 2023 focusing on gender budgeting to promote equality through financing and incorporating migration into their Ministry of Interior and Community. In particular, efforts were aimed at supporting civil society and grass-roots efforts towards enhancing safe migration for women. However, with the change of administration, the Foreign Minister of Germany has done an about-face and renounced FFP in April 2025. With feminist policy seemingly being abandoned by those who began it, Spain has continued to make progress in its FFP. In June 2025, the New Foreign Action Strategy (2025–2028) included a section on the importance of FFP "now more than ever," to position Spain as a regional leader on FFP,[12] but this has yet to translate into any positive action from Spain in the lead-up to the IMRF.

Hold the line: Strengthening the structural resilience of gender responsiveness

The structural embedding of gender equality into the Global Compact for Migration has been significantly bolstered by the committed participation of CSOs as part of United Nations Network on Migration working groups. It has also benefited from the active leadership of UN-Women, who co-led the Gender Workstream with the Gender + Migration Hub between 2022 and 2024, and who now sit on the Network's Executive Committee in a vital decision-making and oversight role. The momentum will hopefully be sustained by the recent appointment of an official Gender Rapporteur for the 2026 IMRF, a role recently endorsed by the United Nations Network on Migration and funded by UN-Women.[13] This role formalizes what was done informally in 2022, where Canada brought members of civil society in their delegation to the IMRF; this included an unofficial Gender Rapporteur that provided the delegation with inputs on gender throughout the meetings, delivered a statement on behalf of Canada focused on gender responsiveness, and provided a brief internal report to the delegation. In 2026, the officially endorsed Gender Rapporteur role further bolsters this role, which is closer to that which was adopted by the Global Compact for Refugee process since the outset – with a group of Rapporteurs including women with lived experience attending all formal negotiation meetings, advocating for attention to gender

[10] Mexico Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Política de Vinculación y Atención Integral para la Mujer – VAIM [Policy of Linkage and Comprehensive Care for Women – VAIM] (6 November 2023) (in Spanish).

[11] Permanent Mission of Colombia to the United Nations Office, Regular migration, labour mobility and human rights: Pillars of development and well-being of societies: GFMD 2024–2025 Colombia Chairship, Concept note (n.d.), p. 2.

[12] Niklas Balbon and Karoline Färber, "No ideological luxury": Calling for an evaluation of Germany's feminist foreign policy (26 June 2025); Spain Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, *Spain's Foreign Action Strategy 2025–2028: Foreign Policy with a Distinct Identity* (Madrid, Cabinet of the Minister, 2025), p. 32.

[13] United Nations Network on Migration, Workplan UN Network on Migration towards the IMRF: June 2025–May 2026 (n.d.).

throughout meetings and generally ensuring that gender considerations were not sidelined.

Additionally, in the lead-up to the 2026 IMRF, stakeholders (including WIMN, International Detention Coalition and Gender + Migration Hub), alongside United Nations agencies,[14] have advocated for the mobilization of the Informal Gender Network of countries and the strategic use of international forums to showcase multilateral cooperation and progress on gender equality. As a result, the United Nations Network on Migration has stepped behind this initiative and called an informal meeting of Member States in March 2026, with an eye to protecting the Global Compact for Migration's Gender-Responsiveness Guiding Principle in both language and implementation. But more needs to be done to stave off the backsliding. CSOs and States must step up actively, purposefully and visibly to bolster the resilience of the Gender-Responsiveness Principle.

States must fight for the Principle in any and every way possible, such as through gender-responsive pledges, utilizing gender-responsive indicators, and most importantly, working multilaterally to keep using gender equality at the fore. The United Nations Secretary-General and the United Nations Network on Migration can take additional steps to bolster the structural resilience of the Principle, such as through the following: (a) implementing monetary incentives tied to the Gender Marker of the Multi-Partner Trust Fund; (b) establishing Member State Regional Gender Leads, establishing a United Nations Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Equality and the Global Compact for Migration; and (c) extending the Gender Rapporteur roles. Finally, it is imperative that the United Nations Network on Migration continue to provide opportunities for CSOs to meaningfully engage in the IMRF and beyond. As the stalwart guardians of the Principles, they need more spaces at the table and more opportunities to be heard. Indeed, none of the progress of the past would have come to fruition without the committed participation of civil society, and to hold the line and protect this progress, their participation must be central.

It is not the time to shy away from gender or to be scared to use the F word – to take bricks and mortar out of the gender-responsive infrastructure of the Global Compact for Migration by such "anticipatory obedience"[15]. Rather, it is the time for States and stakeholders to show leadership through intentional actions that are explicitly designed to strengthen gender-responsiveness and gender equality outcomes. There is just too much on the line not to.

[14] UN-Women, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

[15] Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York, Tim Duggan Books, 2017).

Vol. XV, Number 1, April 2026
MIGRATION POLICY PRACTICE 17

Gender aspects in migration and return: Women's experiences in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan[1]

Caterina Francesca Guidi, Vivianne van der Vorst and Ivona Zakoska-Todorovska[2]

Introduction

Women's migration has become a significant component of global migration flows, and its economic and social effects increasingly shape development outcomes in both origin and destination countries. In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, labour migration has increasingly become a key livelihood strategy for women in recent years amid limited employment opportunities, entrenched gender norms and economic precarity.[3] As of mid-2024, women represented 55 per cent of all Kyrgyz migrants abroad (approximately 298,000), while women accounted for 43 per cent (about 219,000) of the international migrant stock from Tajikistan. The Russian Federation remained the primary destination for both groups. By October 2024, 48,000 Kyrgyz nationals had returned home, of whom women constituted 32 per cent. In the first half of 2024, there were 393,000 Tajik migrants abroad, with women comprising 20 per cent.[4] These migration dynamics are closely linked to national development outcomes through remittances, which continue to be a relevant financial resource. In 2024, remittances amounted to 17.7 per cent of GDP in Kyrgyzstan (USD 3.1 billion) and nearly 48 per cent in Tajikistan (USD 6.8 billion).[5]

Beyond income, women also migrate to support households, repay debts and invest in long-term goals, while navigating restrictive social norms. In Kyrgyzstan, women primarily migrate to improve social and financial autonomy. In Tajikistan, widowed, divorced and single women often migrate out of economic necessity and social pressure.[6] At the same time, women may face gender-specific risks and heightened vulnerability to exploitation and stigma, particularly upon return, when economic gains do not always

[1] This article draws in part on findings presented in IOM, Gender aspects in migration and return: Women's experiences in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Berlin, IOM, 2025). The analysis and interpretation presented here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the full report; any errors or omissions are the responsibility of the authors. The authors contributed to the design of the qualitative research and the analysis of the material, and the first author conducted the KIIs and FGDs both online and in person.

[2] Caterina Francesca Guidi currently works as a Gender Research and Data Analyst consultant for IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Regional Evidence for Migration Analysis and Policy (REMAP) project. She is an economist (with a doctorate in economics) and migration specialist with over 15 years of experience across international organizations, academia and non-governmental organizations. Vivianne van der Vorst is a Senior Project Manager at IOM, specializing in the roll-out and management of large-scale, multilayered and multi-country migration and displacement data systems to feed national and regional planning and (migration) policy development. Ivona Zakoska-Todorovska is the Regional Thematic Specialist for Data and Research and Head of the Regional Data Hub at the IOM Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, based in Vienna. She oversees data and research initiatives across the region. With over 20 years of experience, she collaborates closely with United Nations partners, governments, think tanks and research institutions across Europe and Central Asia.

[3] International Labour Organization (ILO), *Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers: International Migrants in the Labour Force*, Fourth edition (Geneva, ILO, 2024); Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), "Women migrant workers from Central Asia to the Russian Federation: Trends, challenges and prospects", Working paper (ESCAP, 2025).

[4] Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), International migrant stock (New York, United Nations, 2024). DESA figures are subject to verification and potential changes. Tajikistan Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment, "Press release about the activities of the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of the Republic of Tajikistan in 2023" (12 February 2024) (in Russian). IOM, Kyrgyzstan: Baseline Mobility Assessment (BMA) – Round 4 (October 2024) (Berlin and Bishkek, IOM, 2024). Figures should be considered indicative only, as limitations in data collection may lead to under- or overestimation. BMA data does not provide full country coverage and therefore does not capture the entire return population.

[5] World Bank, Personal remittances received (% of GDP), World Bank Development Indicators (accessed 1 April 2026).

[6] Syinat Sultanalieva, *"Nomadity of Being" in Central Asia: Narratives of Kyrgyzstani Women's Rights Activists* (Singapore, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023). Rosella Glenn, "Study on the conditions and behaviors associated with families left behind of Tajik labor migrants" (Dushanbe, IOM, 2022).

translate into social recognition or decision-making power.[7]

This article examines how gender shapes migration experiences and development outcomes throughout the migration cycle. It argues that, without targeted reforms – particularly in skills recognition, legal protections and reintegration services – the benefits of women's migration may remain temporary and uneven. To foster sustainable development, migration policies must better support women's return and reintegration.

Data and methods

This study used a mixed-methods design combining desk research, quantitative analysis and qualitative fieldwork to examine women's migration and return experiences in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The desk research drew on statistical data and literature from Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Uzbekistan to analyse women returnees' aspirations and challenges, labour conditions and the legal and protection frameworks governing migration.

The analysis is based on IOM data collected in 2025, including the Mobility Tracking Matrix (MTM), the Return Migrant Survey (RMS), 15 key informant interviews (KIIs) and 8 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 93 women returnees.[8]

Quantitative findings draw on MTM-RMS Round 4 (December 2024–January 2025), covering 3,281 return migrants interviewed in Kyrgyzstan and 2,252 in Tajikistan. Location selection was informed by MTM Baseline Mobility Assessments (BMA), and respondents were reached through a snowball approach.[9]

KIIs



73% **Total women key informant interviewees**

Composition:

- **33%** 5 government officials;
- **33%** 5 non-governmental organization representatives;
- **20%** 3 international organizations members;
- **14%** 2 academia members

FGDs



93 **return migrant women participants in total**

Composition:

- **39** participants in Kyrgyzstan:
  2 FGDs in Bishkek and
  2 FGDs in Osh City
- **54** participants in Tajikistan:
  2 FGDs in Dushanbe (Firdavsi and Shohmansur districts),
  1 FGD in districts of Central Subordination (Rudaki) and
  1 FGD in Kathlon (Kulab)

[7] IOM, The fragile power of migration: the needs and rights of women and girls from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who are affected by migration (Kazakhstan, IOM Sub-regional Office for Central Asia, 2018); Sergey Ryazantsev, *Return Migration: International Approaches and Regional Features Central Asia* (Almaty, IOM, 2020) (in Russian); Nodira Kholmatova, "The precarity of transnational migration and the COVID-19 pandemic: addressing female return migration in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan", Policy Brief Series No. 3, Migration Governance and Agricultural and Rural Change (AGRUMIG) Project (London, School of Oriental and African Studies University of London, 2021).

[8] MTM is a system used to track and monitor population mobility and displacement. It is adapted to country contexts based on IOM DTM methodology. For more information, see IOM, Methodological framework (31 January 2023). The analysis was conducted under the DTM Regional Evidence for Migration Analysis and Policy project and the Labour Migration Programme-Central Asia, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, with additional support from the European Union.

[9] IOM, Kyrgyzstan: Return migrants survey – Round 4 (January 2025) (Berlin and Bishkek, IOM, 2025); IOM, Tajikistan: Return migrant survey – Round 4 (December 2024) (Berlin and Dushanbe, IOM, 2024).

The qualitative component (May–June 2025) included 15 KIIs and 8 FGDs, with 93 women returnees in both countries. Participants spent at least three months abroad and returned after 2021. Interviews were semi-structured, conducted in relevant languages with confidentiality safeguards, and analysed through systematic coding and triangulation to capture women returnees lived realities.

Gendered migration pathways, labour outcomes and economic agency abroad

Both qualitative and quantitative findings show that Kyrgyz and Tajik women returnees are conditioned by gendered constraints and opportunities, affecting who migrates, how migration is organized, where migrants work abroad, and whether earnings translate into economic agency. In this context, *economic agency* refers to women's ability to make and act on decisions regarding income, financial resources and participation in economic activities within their households and communities.

While men's migration is commonly framed in public discourse and community norms as the default livelihood strategy, women's decisions are more frequently mediated by household expectations, caregiving responsibilities and norms around women's mobility and respectability.[10]

Women's migration pathways also tend to be more individualized and less supported by networks, especially first-time migrants and those who migrate following household disruption. This can increase reliance on intermediaries and informal arrangements, raising exposure to misinformation, insecure legal status and exploitative recruitment practices.[11]

Destinations remain concentrated mainly in the Russian Federation, where women's employment is often segmented into feminized and frequently informal sectors, such as domestic work, cleaning, caregiving, hospitality and retail. These sectors are characterized by lower wages, weaker labour protections and limited bargaining power. In this context, legal status is a key determinant of labour outcomes and can heighten vulnerability to coercion or abuse.[12]

> *"This is about dignity, yes, and everyone in this life should be respected with dignity and to get the information that really will ease your life at the place of destination."*
> (Key informant, Kyrgyzstan)

> *"Migration hardens women, but it also breaks many. When they return, especially if they did not reach their goals, they feel ashamed, isolated and worthless. They need help rebuilding their confidence. We need spaces where women are not judged, where they can be heard and supported. Reintegration is not just about jobs; it is about dignity."*
> (Key informant, Tajikistan)

[10] Anna Rocheva and Evgeni Varshaver, "Gender dimension of migration from Central Asia to the Russian Federation", *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, 32(2):87–135 (2017); Natalia Zotova, Victor Agadjanian, Julia Isaeva and Tohir Kalandarov, "Worry, work, discrimination: Socioecological model of psychological distress among Central Asian immigrant women in Russia", *Social Science and Medicine (SSM) – Mental Health*, 1:100011 (2021).

[11] Madeleine Reeves, *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia* (New York and London, Cornell University Press, 2014).

[12] ESCAP, 2025.

Despite these constraints, the research shows that women's earnings can enhance economic agency when they participate in decisions on remittance use, contribute to household budgets or invest in longer-term goals. Remittances commonly support children and dependent relatives and help stabilize consumption; some women also save, improve housing or set aside capital for small businesses upon return. However, these potential social and economic gains also come with prolonged separation from children, stigma associated with women's absence, and heightened risks of exploitation and harassment in private or weakly regulated workplaces.

Text box 1. Key quantitative findings at a glance

- **Russian Federation as top destination**. According to MTM-RMS Round 4, most Kyrgyz (79% women, 86% men) and Tajik respondents (97% women, 95% men) returned from the Russian Federation. Among migrants intended to remigrate, the Russian Federation also remained the top destination (22% Kyrgyz women, 12% Kyrgyz men; 75% Tajik women, 39 Tajik men). For Kyrgyz respondents, the next most common destinations were the United States of America (20% women, 23% men) and Türkiye (18% women, 7% men). Among Tajik respondents, other destinations included Türkiye (17%) and the United Arab Emirates (8%) for women, and the Republic of Korea (14%) and the United Kingdom (9%) for men.
- **Sector segregation and skills mismatch**. Many women returnees with upper-secondary or tertiary education (such as teaching, health and humanities) worked in low-paid service sectors (hospitality, retail and community services) mainly in the Russian Federation, but also in Kazakhstan, the Republic of Korea, Türkiye, the United Kingdom and the United States. Among Kyrgyz women respondents, the top sectors of employment in the country of destination were other service activities (30%), hotel and restaurant activities (24%) and wholesale and retail trade (19%) Among Tajiks women respondents, more than half (52%) worked in community, social and personal services, followed by manufacturing (21%) and wholesale and retail trade (13%). While men's training (such as engineering and sciences) aligned somewhat better with construction, skills underutilization persisted.
- **Contracts common but rights awareness low; paid leave rare**. Many migrants worked under written contracts (Kyrgyzstan: 67% among both genders; Tajikistan: 62% of women and 65% of men). However, awareness of dismissal protections was limited, with 25 per cent of Kyrgyz women and 17 per cent of Tajik women reporting that they were unaware of their rights. Paid leave was uncommon, with no leave taken by 62 per cent of Kyrgyz women, 63 per cent of Kyrgyz men, 64 per cent of Tajik women and 78 per cent of Tajik men.
- **Remittances: Prevalence and purposes**. Most returnees sent remittances (65% Kyrgyz women, 80% Kyrgyz men; and 74% Tajik women, 97% Tajik men). Remittances mainly covered basic household needs (85% Kyrgyz women, 88% Kyrgyz men; and 77% Tajik women, 87% Tajik men). Beyond basic needs, Kyrgyz women more often prioritized education and health care, while Tajik women more often frequently emphasized property purchases and debt repayment.

Source: IOM, Gender aspects in migration and return: women's experiences in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Overall, policies that expand access to reliable information, safe recruitment channels, regular status and labour protections – combined with financial literacy and savings support – are essential to reducing gender-specific vulnerabilities and maximizing development benefits.[13]

[13] Kholmatova, 2021.

Return, reintegration and policy gaps in gender-responsive migration governance

The research indicates that women's return to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is not a single event, but a transition shaped by pre-departure conditions, experiences abroad and the reintegration environment. Gender-sensitive preparation and protection measures by governments, recruitment agencies and consular services – together with reintegration support from national and local authorities, civil society and development partners – require coordinated efforts across the migration cycle to address women returnees' specific needs.

The findings indicate that women's migration experiences are shaped by vulnerabilities and constraints. Many women migrate with limited access to reliable information on legal pathways, labour rights and services, which increases reliance on informal brokers and riskier travel options. Gender norms can further restrict preparation: women may travel with little family support, face pressure to leave quickly due to financial stress or have fewer opportunities to develop marketable skills. A participant in Rudaki explained, although she was widowed, she could not leave without her siblings' consent:

> Since they always helped me, I could not decide to go to work without their consent.

At the destination, women often work in sectors where labour protections are weak or difficult to access, particularly in informal jobs or private households. Barriers related to documentation and registration can restrict access to health care, legal remedies and social services, while increasing vulnerability to wage withholding, coercion or abuse. As reported by a Kyrgyz key informant:

> They were working up to 12–14 hours a day, with low pay, sometimes without rest.

Return may provide relief but can also bring renewed vulnerability. Many women return with the intention of reuniting with children and investing their earnings in housing, education or small businesses. However, reintegration can be constrained by limited local jobs, weak recognition of experience gained abroad, lack of capital or credit, and expectations to resume unpaid care work. As noted by a Kyrgyz key informant:

> Nobody talks about psychological help. Women just suppress trauma, even after return.

This is echoed by a Tajik key informant:

> Many women did not know where to go […] were misled. Some accepted any work to survive.

Social reintegration can be especially difficult for women who migrated alone or experienced family disruption.

"My children do not treat me like a mother anymore. They are distant, like I'm a stranger"
(FGD, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan)

"Let them say what they want. It makes no difference to me because if I'm left without money and support. None of them will help me."
(FGD, Dushanbe, Tajikistan)

Text box 2. Highlights of quantitative results

- **Return motivations: Family and childcare more prominent for women**. According to MTM-RMS Round 4 results, in Kyrgyzstan, the main reason for return was family (55% of women, 42% of men). Among those returning for family-related reasons, women more frequently cited childcare (44% compared with 23% of men). In Tajikistan, family reasons also dominated (45% of women, 26% of men). Within family-related motives, short visits were the most common (39% of women, 68% of men).
- **Reintegration: Women clustered in unemployment and housewife categories and desire to remigrate.** In Kyrgyzstan, women more often reported being housewives (31%), while men were more frequently unemployed (26%). In Tajikistan, many respondents were unemployed and not seeking work[14] (63% of women, 45% of men), partly reflecting long migration cycles and plans to migrate again. Sectoral segregation persisted: women clustered in service sectors, while men were commonly employed in construction.

Source: IOM. Gender aspects in migration and return: women's experiences in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Conclusions: Linking women's migration and development outcomes

Evidence from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan shows that women's labour migration is already central to household survival and resilience, yet its development potential is limited by gendered risks, unequal power relations and weak support across the migration cycle. This points to the need for gender-responsive governance that links departure, protection abroad and reintegration, rather than treating them as separate tracks.

On return, progress is often threatened by social invisibility: while migrant men are praised for their economic contributions, women's migration is more likely to be judged as a breach of traditional gender roles, especially if they return without savings. Their sacrifices and skills gained abroad are seldom recognized, fuelling stigma, isolation and loss of status, and leaving many women returnees socially invisible in both community life and migration policy. Linking women's migration and development outcomes requires shifting from viewing women mainly as migrants in situations of vulnerability, to recognizing them as economic actors whose agency can be strengthened through rights-based and gender-responsive systems. Across Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, women highlight that reintegration is about dignity and agency as much as income. A whole-of-cycle approach – connecting information, protection and reintegration – can turn migration into durable gains at home, including more stable livelihoods, stronger household well-being and greater economic agency. Priorities include the following: (a) strengthening support across the migration cycle; (b) improving pre-departure information and skills training; (c) ensuring regular status, enforceable contracts, complaint mechanisms and access to legal, health and psychosocial support during migration, and recognizing skills gained abroad upon return; (d) supporting entrepreneurship and reskilling; (e) expanding access to credit and savings women can control; and (f) providing stigma-sensitive psychosocial and community support.

[14] The MTM questionnaire for Tajikistan does not distinguish between housewife and unemployed (whether looking for a job or not) answers.

Vol. XV, Number 1, April 2026
MIGRATION POLICY PRACTICE 23

Innovative pathways to migrant regularization: Lessons from the Opportunity Residence Permit of Germany

Zeynep Yanaşmayan and Pau Palop-García[1]

Introduction

Regularizations in migration policy have often been treated as an anomaly, an exceptional remedy to fix what was not supposed to happen in the first place (that is, irregular migration). Despite their contested nature, regularization mechanisms and programmes have become an integral part of the administrative toolbox of migration governance, with increasing realization that deterrence and (coerced) return measures are insufficient to reduce the numbers of irregular migrants.[2] While regularization mechanisms are often associated with ad hoc measures – such as blanket amnesties that address a large number of irregular migrants in a particular point in time, including the recent announcement from the Government of Spain[3] – many countries include permanent regularization mechanisms into their immigration laws.[4] Germany is no exception and has been enhancing the legal basis for regularizations since 2005.[5]

In this policy brief, implementation of the German Opportunity Residence Permit (ORP) is analysed, highlighting its emergence as an innovative policy within the regularization framework of Germany in 2022 (see Text box 1). A distinctive feature of this temporary legal measure is its function as a transitional instrument for individuals to qualify for one of the permanent regularization mechanisms, which impose more stringent requirements such as employment, language proficiency and verified identity documentation. Therefore, ORP is a residence permit on probation designed as a stepping stone within a two-step procedure and intended to provide irregular migrants a strictly time-limited opportunity of 18 months to fulfil outstanding qualification requirements.

[1] Pau Palop-García is a Political Scientist and Migration Researcher specializing in the study of migration policies and political representation of migrants in transnational spaces. Currently, he is a Researcher for the Migration Department at the German Centre for Integration and Migration Research in Berlin, Germany. Zeynep Yanaşmayan is a social scientist with a focus on migration research. Currently, she is the Head of the Migration Department at the German Centre for Integration and Migration Research in Berlin, Germany. Her focus areas include migration governance at the German and European level, individual (im)mobility aspirations, (ir)regularization processes as well as solidarity practices.

[2] Albert Kraler, "Regularization of irregular migrants and social policies: Comparative perspectives", *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, 17 (1):94–113 (2019).

[3] Sam Jones and Ashifa Kassam, "Spain approves decree to regularise half a million undocumented migrants", *The Guardian* (27 January 2026).

[4] Maegan Hendow and Ayesha Qaisrani, "Pathways and policy evolution: Comparing national laws and policies addressing irregular migrants", Working paper 6/2024 (Krems, University for Continuing Education (Danube University Krems), 2024).

[5] Laura Peitz, "Wege aus der Ausreisepflicht nach ablehnender Asylentscheidung" ["Pathways out of the obligation to leave the country following a negative asylum decision"], Brief Analysis 1 (Nuremberg, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2023).

Text box 1. Key information on the Opportunity Residence Permit

Name:	Opportunity Residence Permit (ORP) (*Chancenaufenthaltsrecht*)
Main dates	Adopted in December 2022 In force from January 2023 to December 2025
Duration of permit	18 months
Target group	Persons who had resided in Germany for at least five years by the cut-off date of 31 October 2022, under a tolerated stay (suspension of deportation) or other precarious legal status.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Political context: the German paradigm shift

When a centre-left government in Germany took office in December 2021 after 16 years of conservative-led administrations, it pledged a paradigm shift towards a modern immigration system that would shape migration in a forward-looking and realistic manner.[6] A wide range of reforms was promised, including facilitation of citizenship acquisition, extension of integration courses to all asylum-seekers and development of further measures to attract labour migrants.

A key element of this paradigm shift was the reduction of irregularity by providing new pathways to legality. ORP, therefore, emerged in this context to address the long-criticized practice of repeatedly extending the tolerated status (*Duldung*) of individuals without offering long-term relief. *Duldung* is a peculiar form of documented irregularity where its holders are not entitled to stay in Germany, yet their deportation is suspended for practical or legal reasons. Although intended as a temporary arrangement, many migrants have remained in Germany under *Duldung* status for several years, leaving them in prolonged legal uncertainty and with very limited opportunities for integration. At the time the ORP was brought to the attention of the Bundestag, approximately 248,000 migrants in Germany were *Duldung* holders, and 137,373 were estimated to reside in Germany for more than five years.[7] ORP precisely targeted this group of long *Duldung* holders and aimed to serve as a window of opportunity.

The policy goals of the Opportunity Residence Permit in a nutshell

The main goal of ORP was to reduce the number of individuals living under *Duldung* by establishing a pathway towards regularized residence. ORP was meant to function as a bridge, granting time to meet the requirements for a long-term status. Crucially, its built-in temporality was designed to incentivize integration and administrative compliance. Beyond these objectives, the Government of Germany also framed ORP as part of its broader strategy to expand the workforce, addressing persistent labour shortages and the challenges posed by demographic change.

[6] Social Democratic Party of Germany, Alliance 90/The Greens and Free Democratic Party, Mehr Fortschritt Wagen: Bündnis Für Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit Und Nachhaltigkeit – Koalitionsvertrag 2021–2025 [Dare More Progress: Alliance for Freedom, Justice and Sustainability – Coalition Agreement 2021–2025] (Berlin, Social Democratic Party of Germany, Alliance 90/The Greens and Free Democratic Party, 2021).

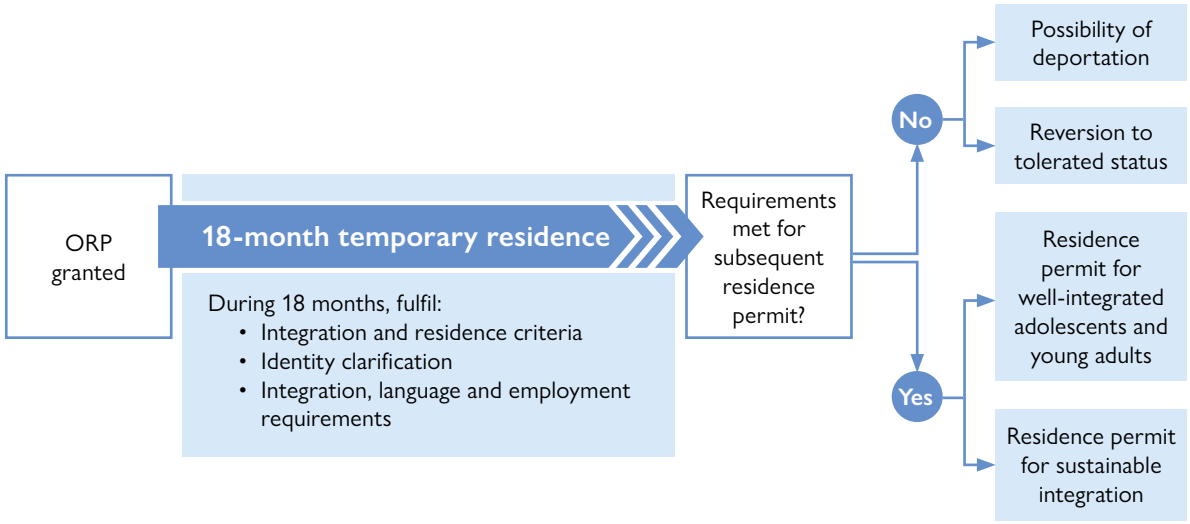
[7] Germany, Government of, Entwurf Eines Gesetzes Zur Einführung Eines Chancen-Aufenthaltsrechts, BR-Drs. 367/22, Bundesregierung [Draft law on the introduction of an Opportunity Residence Permit, Federal Council Document, 367/22] (2022).

Design of the Opportunity Residence Permit

ORP came into force on 31 December 2022 and remained in effect until 30 December 2025. Irregular migrants who have lived in Germany for at least five years by 31 October 2022 – while holding either a *Duldung* or another form of precarious legal status – were eligible to apply for the programme. The eligibility requirements for ORP were kept deliberately low: applicants did not need to provide an identity document, or a valid passport – which is often a ground for their non-deportability – or prove means of subsistence at the time of the application. However, a clear criminal record was required. Offences more serious than misdemeanours, as well as crimes involving the repeated and intentional provision of false information about identity and citizenship, constituted grounds for exclusion.

Applicants who met the criteria were granted an eighteen-month residence permit, which provided access to the labour market, vocational training opportunities and public benefits that had been previously unavailable to individuals with a *Duldung* (Figure 1). Importantly, migrants were expected to use the relief afforded by this eighteen-month permit to fulfil the outstanding requirements needed to transition to one of the permanent regularization mechanisms. These requirements include basic German language skills, proof of livelihood, a commitment to the free democratic basic order and verified identity documentation. This specific set-up, particularly the limited eighteen-month period, required the implementing actors to interpret and apply the law under significant time pressure, raising questions about administrative capacity and policy effectiveness.

Figure 1. Design of the Opportunity Residence Permit



Source: Author's own elaboration.

The challenge: Implementing a regularization policy under time pressure

The implementation of ORP faced several interconnected policy challenges. First, it had to overcome significant political controversy, as opposition parties strongly rejected the reform, while broader migration debates increasingly emphasized deportations rather than regularization. Second, the policy was introduced under tight time constraints, leaving limited room for administrative preparation. This proved particularly problematic given that local

immigration offices were already experiencing substantial bottlenecks and were, in many cases, overburdened, due in part to the almost simultaneous arrival of refugees from Ukraine. At the same time, key support systems had to be upscaled rapidly, especially to meet the increased demand for language and integration courses. Finally, it was plausible that parts of the target group had low levels of trust in public authorities, which could have reduced willingness to engage with the programme, as ORP requires increasing their visibility to the State and potentially increasing the risk of deportation.

Over the last year, the Government of Germany's responses to these challenges were monitored. Comprehensive interviews were conducted with local-level actors (including staff from legal consultation centres and immigration and welfare offices), continuous informal exchanges were held with implementing actors in five German federal States (*Länder*), and official statistics were analysed (see Text box 2). In this policy brief, results of the research are presented in succinct form, particularly the analysis of the implementation challenges of such regularization on probation.

Text box 2. Research design

Purpose	Research on the implementation and effects of ORP
Focus	• Role of ORP within German regularization and migration policy • Implementation practices across regional contexts • Effects on the lives of migrants
Approach	Mixed methods, with a strong focus on qualitative fieldwork and comparative implementation analysis
Data collection	From October 2023 to December 2026
Statistical information	Official statistics from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees
Interviews	28 interviews with immigration officials and practitioners working in support structures

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Opportunity Residence Permit in numbers: from expectations to reality

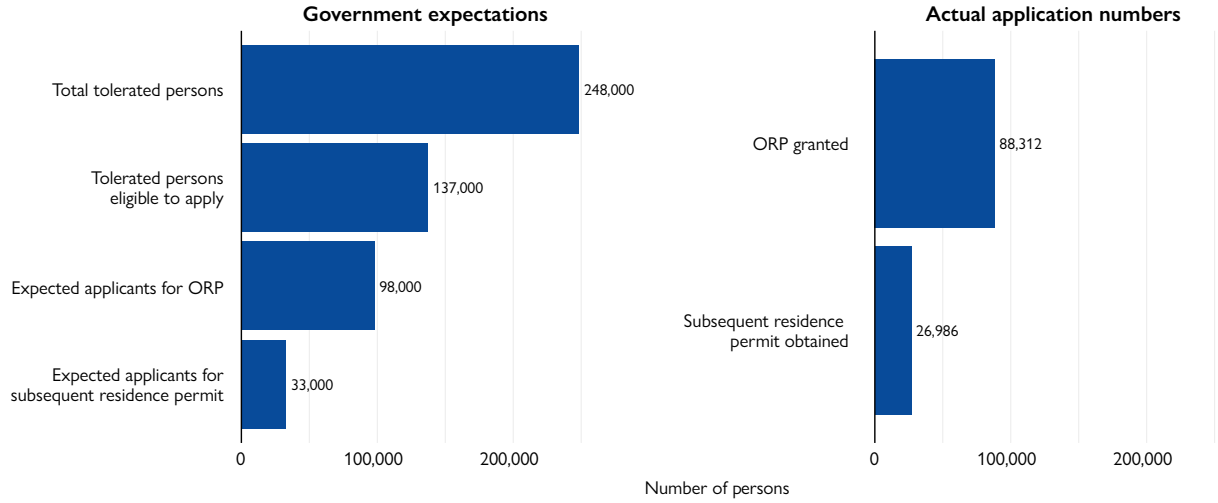
At the end of 2022, the Government of Germany estimated that there were 248,000 individuals with a tolerated status, of whom approximately 137,000 were expected to be eligible to apply for ORP (Figure 2).[8] The Government projected around 98,000 applications for ORP and anticipated that approximately 33,000 applicants would later obtain a subsequent residence permit. By November 2025 (two months before the end of the application deadline), 88,312 ORPs had been granted, and 26,986 subsequent residence permits were issued (Figure 2).[9] Although the total number of applications is not publicly

[8] Deutscher Bundestag, Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Einführung eines Chancen-Aufenthaltsrechts, BT-Drs. 20/3717 [Draft bill on the introduction of the Opportunity Residence Permit] (Berlin, 2022).

[9] Based on information provided by the Bundesministerium des Innern on request of Mediendienst (Fabio Ghelli, "Der Hauptweg aus der Ausreisepflicht" ["The main way out of the obligation to leave"], Mediendienst Integration (last updated 5 June 2025)).

available, early reports[10] and the qualitative interviews confirm that rejections were rare. Thus, a glance at the existing official statistics demonstrates that ORP has indeed been well received by its intended target groups, who have shown a strong interest in the regularization programme and applied in large numbers.

Figure 2. Applications for Opportunity Residence Permit (based on Government expectations and number of applications until November 2025)



Source: Author's own elaboration based on Mediendienst and government data (see footnotes 8 and 9).

Implementing Opportunity Residence Permit: What worked and what did not

The implementation of ORP revealed substantial variation in how the policy was operationalized across local contexts, reflecting the broader complexity of the multilevel migration governance system of Germany. Across the different federal States where the fieldwork was conducted, variance to the implementation of the regularization programme was observed.

A significant dimension involved the extent of information and support offered to migrants. Some local authorities have, from the beginning, worked with lists of migrants who could potentially benefit from this new regularization programme and actively contacted them via email or post to ensure a high turnout. Since this group of migrants regularly needed to show up at the foreigners' offices to extend their one- or three-month *Duldung*, bringing them under the remit of ORP was also considered to be more efficient by some local authorities and an effective means to reduce the workload. Other immigration offices, however, left the application process entirely at the migrants' own initiative. A third alternative was to outsource this process of information and encouragement to non-State actors with legal consultancy services.

Beyond outreach strategies, another key dimension of variation involved the degree of administrative support offered throughout the procedure. At one end of the spectrum, some immigration offices adopted a largely passive approach, placing responsibility on applicants to navigate the process independently. This approach was associated with limited follow-up

[10] Sophie Thieme, "Ein Jahr Chancen-Aufenthalt: Mindestens 75.000 Anträge gestellt" [One year of the Opportunity Residence Permit: At least 75,000 applications submitted], Mediendienst Integration (last updated 25 January 2024).

and low coordination among relevant actors. At the other end, more proactive administrations implemented structured support models, including scheduled appointments, active monitoring of procedural steps, comprehensive initial consultations and targeted assistance (such as preparation for language tests). These approaches were often accompanied by closer coordination between immigration offices and external advisory services, suggesting that implementation outcomes were heavily influenced by local governance capacities and administrative cultures.

Another implementation dimension concerned the handling of deadlines and procedural timelines, which proved to be far from uniform. The time-bound logic of ORP required applicants to meet a series of conditions within a limited period, making administrative discretion in interpreting deadlines particularly consequential. Some authorities, for example, advised applicants to delay submitting their applications, thereby maximizing the time available to meet the requirements. Such practices highlight the extent to which discretion shaped not only the pace but also the accessibility of the procedure.

Support infrastructures (often organized by the civil society) played a central role in implementation. These support systems had to adapt quickly and were not equally developed across regions. Where well-coordinated advisory structures were in place, applicants were better able to navigate administrative demands. In contrast, limited or fragmented support increased the risk that individuals would be unable to meet the requirements for accessing a regular residence permit after the eighteen-month ORP period.

The implementation process generated unequal outcomes across groups and territories. Applicants faced differing starting conditions depending on their place of residence, reflecting variation across federal States and local administrations. While causality is difficult to establish due to the lack of systematic data, it is discernible that in federal States traditionally run by centre-right coalitions, proactive preparation for the workload and support for migrants were less prominent. On the other hand, the variance in implementation outcomes cannot be solely attributed to political ideologies, as individual discretion, bureaucratic ethos and local knowledge repositories are not necessarily shaped by them. The inequalities were also compounded by structural disadvantages: certain groups, such as single mothers or larger families, encountered greater difficulties in meeting the requirements, particularly of livelihood, and were more likely to be filtered out of the process. Similarly, individuals in rural areas often faced additional barriers, for instance in securing stable employment or fulfilling livelihood criteria.

Lessons learned and conclusions

(a) **Regularizations on probation such as ORP can be effective in addressing irregular migration if established as permanent mechanisms**: ORP showed that a time-bound pathway between irregularity and regularization can incentivize compliance (such as employment, language acquisition and identity verification) while offering migrants a credible route to legal status. The temporary relief period allowed migrants to prepare for the transition required for permanent regularization mechanisms in ways that are not possible with the extremely precarious tolerated status. However, making

such mechanism permanent and reducing unnecessary bureaucratic layers could enhance both efficiency and increase uptake. It would also address the inherent unfairness of ad hoc procedures by including migrants who had lived in Germany for a substantial period but had not yet reached five years of residence by the cut-off date.

(b) **Time frames and support structures significantly influence outcomes**: The eighteen-month period was often insufficient to meet all requirements, indicating the need for more flexible timelines. Crucially, strong support structures and proactive administrative guidance (such as counselling, follow-up and coordination) were key to successful transitions, particularly given the conditional nature of the scheme.

(c) **Structural inequalities must be addressed in the design and implementation**: Outcomes varied across regions and social groups, with greater barriers for single mothers, larger families and individuals living in rural areas. Future regularization policies should better account for these inequalities and embed targeted support to ensure equitable access and effectiveness.

Overall, the findings highlight how ORP has opened real opportunities for long-term residency. At the same time, administrative bottlenecks, varying interpretations and resource constraints have limited its impact. Understanding these challenges is essential for improving ORP and informing future efforts to provide fair and sustainable regularization pathways for irregular migrants in Germany and beyond.

IOM and private sector solutions for human rights due diligence to support the World Economic Forum's Global Data Partnership against Forced Labour

Hélène Syed Zwick, Maximilian Pottler and Camila Kirtzman (IOM Thailand)[1]

Introduction

This article examines how data-driven approaches, grounded in migrant worker-centred human rights due diligence (HRDD), can help address the persistent gap between existing frameworks and effective protection outcomes in global supply chains. It argues that migrant workers face disproportionate risks of forced labour driven not only by individual abusive practices but also by structural governance gaps across migration corridors and supply chains. Fragmented and underutilized data systems further limit the effectiveness of current responses.

Against this context, the article introduces the Global Data Partnership against Forced Labour (GDPFL) of the World Economic Forum (WEF) as a catalytic initiative to enable more coordinated, data-driven action. It highlights the strategic contribution of IOM through the establishment of the Impact Data Hub and the development of a standardized, open-source and sector-agnostic methodology as a foundational first step in partnership with Amazon. Together, these elements aim to structure how risks are identified, connected and acted on across different actors and systems.

Thailand is used as an anchor context, reflecting its central role in regional labour migration systems, the scale and complexity of risks faced by migrant workers, and its selection as a pilot setting for the GDPFL proof of concept and the IOM Impact Data Hub.

Background: Human rights due diligence in global supply chains

Migrant workers are disproportionately exposed to human rights risks within complex, multilayered supply chains, with forced labour representing one of the most severe forms of abuse. They are classified as a high-risk group and statistically three times more likely to experience forced labour than local workers. According to the most recent estimates of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2022, 27.6 million people are subjected to forced labour worldwide. Of these, nearly 17.3 million are trapped within private sector supply chains. The Asia-Pacific region has the highest number of people in forced labour, reaching 15.1 million.[2] In Thailand, forced labour persists, primarily affecting migrant workers in fishing, seafood processing and domestic work.[3] The 2023 Global Slavery

[1] Hélène Syed Zwick is the Head of the Migration Data and Research Unit at IOM Thailand. She leads research on human mobility trends, climate-related mobility and policy-relevant data initiatives, collaborating with governments, academia and the private. Maximilian Pottler heads the Labour Mobility and Social Inclusion Unit at IOM Thailand. He collaborates with governments, civil society and businesses to promote safe labour migration, protect migrants' rights and develop evidence-based tools. Camila Kirtzman is a Reporting Officer with the Migration Data and Research Unit at IOM Thailand. She has over five years of experience in migration data analysis and reporting for IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix.

[2] ILO, Walk Free and IOM, *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage* (Geneva, ILO, Walk Free and IOM, 2022).

[3] United Nations Network on Migration, Thailand Migration Report 2024 (Bangkok, United Nations Network on Migration in Thailand, 2024).

Index estimated that 401,000 people were living in forced labour or similar conditions in Thailand in 2021.[4] Migrant workers' vulnerability to exploitation and abuse is rarely inherent and driven by two distinct levels. First, at the actor level, some recruiters and employers may abuse a worker's situation or limited bargaining power to impose exploitative conditions. At the systemic level, governance gaps and a lack of integrity – often manifesting as corruption or policy incoherence between origin, transit and destination countries – create structural gaps along migration pathways where exploitation may remain hidden and enforcement inconsistent. These vulnerabilities are compounded by migration governance models that prioritize immigration control over labour protection and by employer-tied visas and sponsorship schemes that create structural power imbalances.

This structural dependency worsens when irregular migration status, fear of losing migration status, debt bondage, isolation or language barriers are exploited to impose conditions workers would otherwise never accept. Wage theft through undisclosed deductions frequently results from these compounding vulnerabilities. Debt bondage, which often begins during the recruitment phase, forces migrants to continue working to repay manipulated or inflated debts. Both irregular practices (such as fraudulent recruitment and debt bondage) and restrictive policies (such as employer-tied permits, freedom of association and access to justice) can lead to irregularity or the constant threat of losing migration status, limiting workers' ability to seek remedy.

Human rights due diligence as a framework to address violations against migrant workers

In line with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct, human rights due diligence (HRDD) provides a systematic framework for businesses to identify, assess, prevent, mitigate and account for how they address their actual and potential impacts on human rights. It also requires that companies provide or cooperate in remedy where their activities have caused or contributed to adverse impacts, or where such impacts are directly linked to their operations, products or services.[5]

The distinction between voluntary and mandatory HRDD frameworks is important. Voluntary schemes alone, without independent enforcement mechanisms, are often insufficient to address systemic violations. State-enforced obligations, coupled with worker-driven monitoring – including through collective bargaining with trade unions – are essential to effective HRDD.

The global economy is closely linked to the cross-border movement of people, placing the intersection of global supply chains and labour migration at the most critical frontier of the business and human rights agenda. Within this landscape, UNGPs serve as a road map for both

[4] Walk Free, Global Slavery Index (accessed 27 March 2026).

[5] OECD, *OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2023).

States and businesses to prioritize dignity.[6] Key references also include the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct[7] and the ILO Social Policy. Both the UNGPs and the OECD Guidelines apply to all States and business enterprises and fully cover human rights harms affecting migrant workers, regardless of whether migrant workers are explicitly referenced in every provision.

Data gaps and fragmented information as an obstacle to effective response

Despite the availability of strong guidelines and a growing array of tools, the impact of measures taken by businesses and governments to protect migrant workers remains limited and uneven. One significant challenge is the effectiveness of actions taken rather than mere lack of engagement.[8] Efforts to protect migrant workers are consistently weakened by fragmented approaches and persistent information gaps that leave visibility partial and collective action limited.[9] This fragmentation reflects how the governance of adverse human rights impacts has evolved across different mandates, legal frameworks and accountability systems, creating conditions in which exploitation can remain undetected through traditional traceability methods.

Across this ecosystem, stakeholders collect large volumes of data and generate valuable insights, yet these rarely converge. Governments compile labour market, labour inspection and migration data. Companies gather social audit results and supplier information as part of corporate due diligence processes, yet these tools often fail to detect exploitation that occurs through subcontracting, recruitment intermediaries or informal arrangements. Civil society organizations and trade unions document worker experiences and grievances through case management systems, worker-voice platforms and hotlines, which offer some of the most direct insights into exploitation and abuse. However, this data is rarely integrated systematically into enforcement mechanisms or prevention strategies. International organizations, such as ILO and IOM, contribute research, operational monitoring and technical support to States along migration pathways.

What emerges is a data ecosystem characterized by fragmentation: data and insights are produced in parallel, within institutional and sectoral silos, resulting in only a partial understanding of adverse human rights impacts and inconsistent detection driven by varying definitions and methodologies. Even when critical information exists, it often remains disconnected, underutilized or inaccessible to those who could best positioned to act.

Significant blind spots persist, especially for migrant workers. Recruitment-related issues frequently occur in countries of origin, before formal employment begins in the destination country, placing them beyond the reach of many labour inspections and corporate audits. Recruitment practices are often informal, opaque and deliberately hidden, making them difficult to capture through conventional data-collection methods. Violations in destination countries are also frequently undercounted:

[6] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework* (New York and Geneva, United Nations, 2011).

[7] OECD, Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct (OECD, 2018).

[8] WEF, "Harnessing data and intelligence for collective advantage: Ending forced labour in global supply chains", White paper (Geneva, WEF, 2026).

[9] Ibid.

restrictions on the right to organize and bargain collectively, occupational safety and health hazards, violence and harassment in the workplace, wage theft and limited access to leave entitlements disproportionately affect migrant workers yet remain poorly documented. All ILO member States are obligated to uphold the five core labour rights under the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (freedom of association and collective bargaining, elimination of forced labour, abolition of child labour, elimination of discrimination, and a safe and healthy work environment) regardless of whether they have ratified the related ILO conventions.[10]

IOM as a founding partner of a catalytic solution: The Global Data Partnership against Forced Labour

To break this cycle, the GDPFL was officially launched at Davos in January 2025, following several years of technical consultations and multi-stakeholder dialogue. The initiative responds to a convergence of systemic governance failures, tightening legal and regulatory requirements across jurisdictions, and technological advances that make coordinated, data-driven action both feasible and necessary.[11] As a founding member, IOM provides ongoing technical and operational support, leads stakeholder engagement and offers strategic advice and technical input into the frameworks and tools developed under the initiative.

While the broader mandate of IOM supports the full spectrum of actual and potential adverse human rights impacts at all stages of migration, GDPFL focuses specifically on forced labour as a severe and measurable subset of those risks within global supply chains.

As described in the WEF white paper,[12] the partnership aims to operate on a federated data infrastructure that enables multiple independent organizations to share and analyse data where it resides. It provides a trusted, pre-competitive infrastructure for coordinated global action, connecting data and insights securely across systems by leveraging Agentic Artificial Intelligence (AI) and natural language processing. Rather than creating a central data super-Power, the system links signals from data and insights, such as worker grievances, recruitment records and migration movements, to uncover risk patterns that are invisible to traditional traceability methods. Each partner maintains sovereignty over its own data while benefiting from common protocols and governance mechanisms that ensure privacy, security and ethical use.

By receiving a federated signal rather than siloed data sets, stakeholders gain access to actionable intelligence generated by an AI agent that triangulates disparate information. This signal is constructed by linking anonymized worker grievances and survivor testimonies with macrolevel migration trends – including sudden increases in recruitment fees – company assessment information such as audit records. The resulting signal functions as an early warning of systemic risks, such as debt bondage within a specific tier-2 supplier, enabling predictive risk modelling that allows stakeholders to intervene before abuses become systemic.

The practical applications are significant. Labour inspectors can adopt risk-based enforcement

[10] ILO, *General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment and Definition of Recruitment Fees and Related Costs* (Geneva, ILO, 2019).

[11] WEF, 2026.

[12] Ibid.

models, prioritizing investigations at factories or recruitment agencies flagged by high-risk patterns. Governments can act on emerging trends to design responsive policies and close governance gaps. Businesses are empowered to exercise leverage, initiate remediation and avoid immediate legal or reputational exposure. Civil society organizations, trade unions, migrant worker organizations and investors can use these validated insights to amplify worker voices, strengthen collective bargaining and target resources more effectively.

IOM–Amazon Impact Data Hub: A collaboration to leverage the partnership

The IOM–Amazon collaboration provides catalytic seed funding to establish a comprehensive, migration-informed HRDD workstream, materialized through the creation of the Impact Data Hub. The initiative aims to identify the full range of actual and potential adverse human rights impacts affecting migrant workers and produce a standardized, open-source, sector-agnostic methodology that can support the broader HRDD efforts beyond the partnership.

The project's initial phase focuses on co-creating that methodology through sustained stakeholder engagement, technical discussions and consultations with businesses, trade unions and foundations. It also includes a systematic mapping of existing standards, operational tools and relevant IOM data. The methodological design is anchored in the UNGPs, the indicators of forced labour, the OECD Due Diligence Guidance and the IOM Migrant Worker Guidelines for Employers.[13] Its defining structural feature is that risk identification follows the full migration journey – from pre-recruitment through recruitment, transit, arrival, employment and return. The framework is expected to apply a hybrid detection approach that combines quantitative indicators with qualitative contextual analysis. The methodology is not an audit tool; it generates risk signals to inform protective action rather than compliance scores. Vulnerability intersectionality serves a cross-cutting analytical lens, acknowledging how gender and migration status interact in compounding ways. The goal is to establish a coherent analytical foundation to inform prevention, mitigation and remediation strategies across different contexts.

Policy implications and the path forward

IOM is strategically positioned to contribute to two interrelated goals: (a) the development of migration-responsive HRDD methodologies; and (b) the operationalization of data-driven initiatives to address adverse human rights impacts, including forced labour. These contributions reflect the broader mandate of IOM to ensure that migration is safe, orderly and regular, and that migrant workers' rights are protected at all stages of the migration process.

This role is operationalized through the following four institutional pillars:

(a) Institutional migration-sensitive risk analysis: IOM is well positioned to consolidate and operationalize a standardized methodology. The intention is to embed this framework across IOM country offices and make it accessible to other actors, supporting comparability and reducing reliance on ad hoc assessments.

[13] IOM, *Migrant Worker Guidelines for Employers* (Geneva, IOM, 2022).

(b) Multi-stakeholder collaboration and data-sharing: IOM is well-placed to facilitate coordination among governments, the private sector and civil society. Leveraging existing networks, IOM can lead outreach efforts to co-create data-driven solutions that integrate insights from migrant workers, trade unions, businesses and governments with worker-voice inputs.

(c) Anchoring data initiatives in national systems: Rather than creating parallel mechanisms, IOM can continue to engage with government authorities – including relevant ministries, inspection authorities and statistical offices – to ensure that analytical outputs inform policy design, enforcement and protection services. This includes supporting clear governance arrangements that define how data and insights are used and acted upon.

(d) Translating analysis into protection and remedy: The value of data-driven work ultimately lies in its ability to facilitate timely interventions. The operational presence of IOM enables it to link risk signals with concrete responses, including worker assistance, referral pathways and engagement with employers and recruiters to address harm at its source.

By reinforcing shared methodologies, institutional ownership and the responsible use of data, IOM can help to ensure that innovation translates into tangible improvements in preventing and remedying adverse human rights impacts, including forced labour, and in strengthening the protection of migrant workers.

36 Vol. XV, Number 1, April 2026
MIGRATION POLICY PRACTICE

Regularizing Venezuelans in the Andes: Lessons in design and implementation

Alessandra Enrico[1]

Introduction

The displacement of Venezuelans is unprecedented in scale and has reshaped legal protection dynamics in Latin America. It has unfolded largely as a South–South movement, with most Venezuelans relocating to neighbouring States. By 2025, over 7.7 million had left the country, the majority settling within South America. Since 2015, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru (three of the Andean countries) have responded to sustained inflows with large-scale exceptional regularization programmes.

In the Andean countries, these initiatives enabled rapid documentation and facilitated access to legal status and basic services. They have also operated as a practical complement to asylum systems that were quickly overwhelmed by growing numbers of refugee applications and struggled to provide timely protection at scale. Drawing on a comparative analysis of Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, this article assesses how programme design and implementation shape institutional governance and de facto enjoyment of rights, identifying lessons for long-term integration and future regularization initiatives. Beyond the Andean context, these experiences inform regularization debates in regions facing protracted displacement. They also illustrate the bidirectional circulation of migration policy practices within and beyond the region, alongside a turn towards principled pragmatism in migration governance to reconcile protection commitments with the realities of displacement.

Managing scale: the Andean shift towards regularization

State responses to Venezuelan displacement have shifted significantly, marked by the creation of ad hoc regularization programmes and subsequent institutional reforms. From the outset of Venezuelan mobility, the lack of accessible legal residence pathways led many to rely on asylum systems as the primary route to protection.[2] As the outflow of Venezuelans began to accelerate from 2014[3] and asylum claims rose sharply from around 2016,[4] asylum institutions became overstretched and struggled to handle a large-scale and protracted movement. Governments therefore increasingly turned to migration-based legal pathways, most commonly through regularization programmes offering renewable temporary status.

These instruments allowed States to grant legal status at scale, strengthen population data and support integration planning. For migrants, they provided faster access to documentation,

[1] Alessandra Enrico is a Peruvian lawyer and doctor of philosophy candidate in Migration Studies at the University of Oxford, affiliated with the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society and the Refugee Studies Centre. She is also an associate professor of international law at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PUCP) in Lima, Peru. Her research examines migration governance, with a focus on asylum, temporary protection and regularization programmes in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

[2] The Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela reports 1,363,522 pending Venezuelan asylum claims worldwide as of 30 June 2025.

[3] Carolina Mejia-Mantilla, Stephanie González, Julia Lendorfer and Daniel Rodríguez, Venezuelans in Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru: a development opportunity (World Bank and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024).

[4] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Venezuela situation: Responding to the needs of people displaced from Venezuela, Supplementary appeal, January–December 2018.

enabling them to remain legally in the territory while exercising rights and accessing services. Over time, temporary protection measures for Venezuelans in the Andean region have consolidated as a central tool of displacement management, despite operating largely outside ordinary migration legislation. Their increasing reliance on time-limited status has, however, exposed persistent challenges in programme design and the effective exercise of rights.

Common design features for addressing Venezuelan mobility

Across the three Andean countries, regularization emerged not as an incidental policy choice, but as a structured response to sustained, high-volume arrivals. Through phased implementation, targeted eligibility criteria and time-bound registration windows, these initiatives prioritized administrative feasibility and rapid documentation. Nonetheless, structural constraints related to requirements and institutional capacity persisted. These shared design features positioned regularization as a central instrument for managing large-scale mobility while restoring administrative visibility within national systems.

Peru

Faced with a sharp rise in asylum applications, Peru was among the first countries in the region to introduce a large-scale regularization, launching the *Permiso Temporal de Permanencia* (PTP) in 2017. PTP evolved through successive phases that expanded eligibility, including to Venezuelans who had entered irregularly, and introduced renewal windows allowing beneficiaries to maintain regular status while enabling the State to monitor conditions in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Although this innovative design responded to changing migration patterns, limitations soon emerged. Short and frequently adjusted application timelines, together with fees, placed pressure on applicants and administrative capacity. Alongside the introduction of an expedited asylum procedure at the northern border in 2019, these dynamics reduced policy predictability and may have contributed to intermittent lapses in regular status.[5]

After a period without available regularization or renewal processes, a broader scheme was introduced in 2019 to address these shortcomings. The *Carné de Permiso Temporal de Permanencia* (CPP) broadened eligibility, extended registration periods and formalized temporary residence pathways, although challenges in transitioning to permanence persisted.

Colombia

Colombia followed a similar phased approach, although its second iteration placed greater emphasis on extended temporariness. The *Permiso Especial de Permanencia* (PEP), introduced in 2017, functioned as an initial large-scale response, granting temporary stay through successive phases with differentiated eligibility criteria targeting specific migrant profiles. Over time, the multiplication of phases, short-permit durations and repeated renewals exposed the limits of this model, prompting the adoption of a more comprehensive framework for Venezuelans: the *Estatuto Temporal de Protección para Migrantes Venezolanos* (ETPV), also conceived as a temporary instrument but with a longer time-horizon.

In design terms, ETPV extended protection for up to ten years and introduced a unified

[5] Alessandra Enrico-Headrington, "El derecho al asilo para personas venezolanas en la frontera norte del Perú: un análisis desde los derechos humanos" ["The right to asylum for Venezuelans on Peru's northern border: An analysis from a human rights perspective"], Master's thesis (Lima, PUCP, 2020) (in Spanish).

registration process,[6] enabling documentation at scale while strengthening data systems and institutional coordination. Structural challenges, however, persist. Its nationality-specific focus and continued reliance on temporary status raise questions about long-term integration. Although ETPV formally includes a route to permanent residence after five years, procedural requirements make transition complex,[7] reinforcing the predominance of temporariness within the regularization model of Colombia.

Ecuador

In Ecuador, regularization programmes also evolved through successive phases. The *Visa de Excepción por Razones Humanitarias* (VERHU) initially relied on strict cut-off dates and regular entry requirements, limiting its reach. As displacement persisted, the Government introduced the *Visa de Residencia Temporal de Excepción* (VIRTE), implemented in phases with progressively broader eligibility criteria. Under VIRTE II, an amnesty removing sanctions for irregular stay shifted the programme towards a more inclusive design and enabled the regularization of migrants previously outside legal pathways.

Access, however, depended on a two-step process involving different authorities. Migrants first had to complete registration and security checks with the Ministry of the Interior before applying for the visa through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,[8] extending timelines and increasing administrative complexity. Frequent regulatory changes, including revised cut-off dates linked to political transitions, affected continuity and predictability, complicating renewals and transitions to permanent status. In March 2025, the withdrawal of the legal basis for VIRTE II halted new applications. While visas already issued remain valid, the suspension has reduced access for potential applicants, illustrating how changes in the political context can influence the continuity of regularization frameworks.

From a design perspective, these programmes have been characterized by their exceptional and temporary nature, implemented in phases and structured around cut-off dates. Over time, they were recalibrated to expand or narrow coverage in response to evolving political and migration dynamics. Although legal frameworks and institutional capacities differed, all three countries relied on flexible design features to manage scale. In this context, regularization assumed a complementary role within migration governance, easing pressure on asylum systems while providing an alternative legal pathway that enabled regular stay in the territory.

Yet implementation has exposed common challenges. Reliance on temporary protection has constrained legal certainty and long-term planning, while frequent regulatory adjustments and fragmented institutional responsibilities have affected predictability and coherence in practice. The result is a visible tension between managing displacement at scale and ensuring that regularization delivers durable and meaningful inclusion.

[6] Decree 216, art. 6 (*Registro Único de Migrantes Venezolanos* was established to collect data for policy design and identify eligible Venezuelans).

[7] Colombia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Resolution No. 5477 por la cual se establecen disposiciones en materia de visas [Resolution No. 5477 whereby Provisions regarding Visas are Established] (22 July 2022), art. 24(4) (in Spanish). However, authorities may require additional documents, including proof of income, monthly expenses in Colombia and a criminal background check. See also Colombia, Government of, Visa R Venezolanos bajo ETPV [Visa R Venezuelans under ETPV] (accessed 13 February 2026) (in Spanish).

[8] Executive Decree No. 436, Art. 3.

Access to documentation and the exercise of rights

Regularization programmes in the Andean countries converge along two central aspects. First, they aim to reduce irregularity by issuing documentation and granting legal stay, enhancing administrative visibility and formal recognition within national systems. Second, they were explicitly designed to support the fulfilment of basic economic and social rights and facilitate access to related services, including work, education and, in certain contexts, health care. In practice, however, the translation of legal status into effective access has varied, reflecting nuances across contexts. Table 1 summarizes the scope of rights and associated services under regularization programmes across the three countries.

Table 1. Comparative features of regularization in the Andean countries

Country/ programme	Colombia		Peru		Ecuador	
Main features	PEP (2017)	ETPV (2021)	PTP (2017)	CPP (2021)	VERHU (2019)	VIRTE (2022)
Document granted	Residence card and ID	Residence card and ID	Residence card	Residence card	Residence card and ID	Residence card and ID
Duration of permit (months)	3	Up to 120	12	12	24	24
Access to permanent residence	No	Yes, after 5 years	No	No	Yes	Yes
Access to work	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Access to education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Access to health care	Yes	Yes	Emergency and maternity care only	Emergency and maternity care only	Yes	Yes

Sources: Original elaboration by the author using data from the following: (a) Decree 216 of 2021; (b) Resolution 971 of 2021; (c) Supreme Decree 002-2017-IN; (d) Supreme Decree 023-2017-IN; (e) Supreme Decree 001-2018-IN; (f) Supreme Decree 010-2020-IN; (g) Executive Decree 826 (2019); (h) Executive Decree 436 (2022); (i) Executive Decree 698 (2023); (j) Executive Decree 753 (2023); and (k) Executive Decree 370 (2024).

Access to documentation has been the primary factor shaping inclusion outcomes under regularization. Beyond granting legal stay, documentation has provided legal certainty and formal recognition of identity, enabling Venezuelans to interact with public institutions and private actors, such as employers, landlords and service providers. However, programme requirements and timelines have significantly influenced who could get a document. Proof of address, passport requirements and criminal record certificates created practical obstacles, particularly for migrants with unstable housing, expired or unavailable documents, or limited financial resources to cover application fees and the costs of securing the required documentation.[9] Although certain requirements

[9] Diario Oficial El Peruano, Resolution N° 000109-2023-Migraciones Indican requisitos, tipo de evaluación y establecen condiciones del procedimiento administrativo de Permiso Temporal de Permanencia [Resolution No. 000109-2023-Migration Requirements, Type of Evaluation and Conditions for the Administrative Procedure of the Temporary Stay Permit are Established] (8 May 2023) (in Spanish); Government of Colombia, Resolution N. 0971 por la cual se implementa el Estatuto Temporal de Protección para Migrantes Venezolanos [Resolution No. 0971 Implementing the Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan Migrants], adopted by Decree 216 of 2021 (28 April 2021) (in Spanish); Government of Ecuador, Ministerial Agreement N° 000048, por el cual se establece los requisites y el procedimiento para la emission de la Visa de Residencia Temporal de Excepción-VIRTE [Ministerial Agreement No. 000048, which establishes the requirements and procedure for issuing the Exceptional Temporary Residence Visa (VIRTE)] (29 Jun 2023) (in Spanish).

were progressively adjusted in recognition of the Venezuelan context, including the acceptance of expired passports as a pragmatic and positive practice,[10] practical barriers persisted. Consequently, even where regularization pathways were available, not all eligible individuals were able to access them on equal terms. This contributed to a gap between formal eligibility and effective access across the three countries.

A second aspect concerns the fulfilment of basic economic and social rights. Regularization programmes were formally intended to facilitate inclusion in key sectors, particularly access to formal employment. In Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, these schemes granted authorization to work. In practice, however, labour-market inclusion has depended on recognition beyond migration authorities. Limited awareness and acceptance of regularization documents among employers have reduced their practical value.[11] In addition, national labour regulations governing the hiring of foreign workers, including quota systems and payroll limitations, have further shaped access to employment.[12] As a result, work authorization has not always led to labour-market inclusion.

Access to health services illustrates how programme design choices directly shape inclusion outcomes. In Colombia, integrating regularization permits into national identification and health registration systems has facilitated access to health care beyond emergency treatment. In Ecuador, constitutional guarantees of universal health care have been reinforced by regularization processes that reduce administrative barriers. In Peru, by contrast, regularization has not been systematically linked to health coverage schemes, and access remains largely confined to emergency and maternity care.[13] These differences demonstrate that the developmental impact of regularization depends not only on legal status, but on how that status is embedded within sectoral systems. Where regularization is institutionally connected to health registries, access becomes more predictable and sustainable. Where such linkages are absent, inclusion remains partial.

Access to education follows a similar pattern across the three countries. School enrolment is formally allowed regardless of migration status, but implementation varies locally. In Colombia, regularization has provided documentation that facilitates school registration and interaction between families, schools and local authorities. In Ecuador, where the right to education is constitutionally guaranteed, VERHU and VIRTE processes have reduced administrative barriers linked to identity and registration, easing enrolment. In Peru, while access to basic education is formally guaranteed, enrolment and continuity remain affected by gaps in recognized documentation and discretionary interpretation of rules at the school level. These cases highlight that policy design requires operational clarity and local-level consistency to become meaningful in practice.

[10] Ecuador: Executive Decree no. 436, art. 4; Colombia: MFA Resolutions nos. 872 and 2231, art. 1; Peru: Superintendency Resolution no. 000121-2024-MIGRACIONES, art. 3.

[11] Diego Chaves-González, María Jesús Mora, Ana Alanis and Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan, Key considerations for future temporary protection and regularization programs in Latin America (Washington, D.C., Migration Policy Institute, 2025), p. 17.

[12] Hernández G., José Ignacio and Alessandra Enrico-Headrington, *Marco Regulatorio de la Migración Laboral Internacional en América Latina y el Caribe* [*Regulatory Framework for International Labour Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean*] (Inter-American Development Bank, 2025) (in Spanish).

[13] Patricio Zambrano-Barragán, Sebastián Ramírez Hernández, Luisa Feline Freier, Marta Luzes, Rita Sobczyk, Alexander Rodríguez and Charles Beach, "The impact of COVID-19 on Venezuelan migrants' access to health: A qualitative study in Colombian and Peruvian cities", *Journal of Migration and Health*, 3 (2020), p. 4.

What the Andean experience reveals about regularization

The Andean experience offers three interlinked lessons on the role of regularization in contexts of large-scale displacement. First, regularization has reshaped migration governance, driving rapid institutional adaptation and expanding administrative capacity. Faced with unprecedented inflows, States were required to deploy rapid and innovative responses in contexts where such movements had been rare. For migrants, it has provided a pathway out of irregularity and formal recognition within national systems.

Second, the effectiveness of regularization has depended less on legal status alone than on the time-horizon embedded in programme design. While temporary permits provide short-term responses, their predominantly time-bound nature signals uncertain prospects of residence. Except for ETPV of Colombia, most schemes have offered narrow and procedurally complex pathways towards permanent residence, despite clear evidence that many migrants will remain in the medium and long term. This disconnect between temporary policy design and protracted displacement realities has constrained longer-term integration outcomes.

Third, legal status has not automatically translated into the effective respect and fulfilment of basic rights and associated services. Labour-market inclusion, school enrolment and health-care access have depended on the extent to which migration documentation is recognized and operationalized beyond migration authorities. Strengthening coordination across institutions is therefore essential. Where migration status is effectively integrated into sectoral policies and systems, inclusion becomes more consistent and sustainable; where such integration is limited, outcomes remain constrained.

Conclusion

Regularization has increasingly emerged as a recurrent feature of migration governance in the Andean region, often used as an ad hoc policy response to large-scale displacement. Since 2017, regularization has anchored the region's legal response to Venezuelan displacement, enabling legal recognition at scale, improved administrative visibility and reduced irregularity, while easing pressure on asylum systems so that they can focus on those in need of international protection. Beyond managing status, regularization has provided a foundation for more orderly inclusion and informed policy planning.

The Andean cases offer lessons for future regularization efforts within and beyond the region, reflecting the bidirectional circulation of policy practices. They also build on a broader South American tradition of protection through regularization, including the MERCOSUR Residence Agreement, which has facilitated regional mobility. As migration policies tighten, the Andean experience highlights regularization as a pragmatic tool to manage mobility while preserving basic legal protections.

Across the three countries, shared design elements such as phased implementation, cut-off windows and simplified documentation show how regularization can form part of a broader migration management toolkit. Cross-country variations highlight the central role of programme design in shaping inclusion outcomes. The duration of legal status influences integration

prospects, while broader eligibility criteria allow programmes to reach a larger share of migrants. Similarly, reducing administrative and financial barriers and tailoring requirements to the realities of the target population can expand access to legal status. These variations confirm that regularization is not a fixed model, but a flexible policy instrument whose effectiveness depends on how programmes are designed and implemented on the ground.

However, programme architecture provides only part of the picture. The decisive test lies in how regularization operates in practice and how migrants experience it across sectors. Further research should examine these dynamics from migrants' perspectives, including how protection categories shape access and prospects. Such experiences are essential to assessing whether regularization delivers meaningful and durable inclusion beyond its formal intent. Incorporating migrants' experiences, including those of previously regularized migrants, into policy consultations can also help design more effective programmes. These insights are increasingly relevant for policymakers in other regions confronting protracted displacement, where regularization may serve as a pragmatic governance tool.

Vol. XV, Number 1, April 2026
MIGRATION POLICY PRACTICE 43

Pathway promises and policy realities: Lessons from the International Student Reset of Canada

Lisa Ruth Brunner and Dhriti Mehta[1]

Introduction

In 2019, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) described Canada as "a role model for successful migration management," praised for "swift policy reaction to new evidence and emerging challenges."[2] However, in the international student immigration stream, post-COVID-19 intake growth outpaced the governing frameworks designed to manage it. This mismatch weakened public support for immigration and ultimately prompted the country's first-ever cap on international students in 2024. This article identifies four interconnected failures in the international student policy environment of Canada during this period and outlines lessons for policymakers seeking to design viable and sustainable international student–immigration pathways.

Since the early 2000s, Canada has positioned international students as ideal immigrants: young, proficient in the official languages of Canada and labour market–ready through their Canadian educational credentials and work experience. Most studied at the undergraduate level and paid tuition fees several times higher than domestic rates.[3] International students and their spouses were attracted by relatively generous work authorization policies, both during and after studies, as well as by the possibility of permanent residency. Over time, a patchwork of federal and provincial immigrant selection programmes favouring international graduates emerged, promoted by governmental, institutional and private actors. The possibility of permanent residency came to be viewed as an implicit promise, fuelling further interest in Canada as a study destination. A distinct immigration pathway – often referred to as *edugration* – thus developed as a multistep study–work–stay model that integrated higher education and immigration.[4] Between 2000 and 2019, the share of new economic principal applicant immigrants with Canadian study experience rose from 6 per cent to 38 per cent.[5]

For nearly two decades, edugration was portrayed as a triple win for the higher education sector of Canada, its economy and the students themselves. International education was framed as a key Canadian export industry, and international student tuition became integral to the operating budgets of public post-secondary institutions. Enrolments rose rapidly in the mid-2010s, followed by an even sharper acceleration during the 2022–2023 post-pandemic period. By 2022, Canada was among the world's leading international education hubs; that year, international students contributed CAD 30.9 billion to the Canadian economy,

[1] Lisa Ruth Brunner is a Research Associate at the University of British Columbia's Centre for Migration Studies, a Public Policy Consultant with the Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of British Columbia, and a Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant. Dhriti Mehta is a PhD student in Political Science at the University of British Columbia and a Graduate Research Assistant with the Bridging Divides initiative. Her research examines immigration governance in advanced democracies, with a focus on high-skilled migration and the technology sector's role in shaping contemporary migration policy.

[2] OECD, *Recruiting Immigrant Workers: Canada 2019* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2019).

[3] Statistics Canada, Elementary to postsecondary student education dashboard (date modified 17 December 2025).

[4] Lisa Ruth Brunner, "'Edugration' as a wicked problem: Higher education and three-step immigration", *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education*, 13(5):25–37 (2021).

[5] Eden Crossman and Feng Hou, "International students as a source of labour supply: Pre-immigration study in Canada and post-immigration earnings", *Economic and Social Reports*, 2(2) (2022).

equivalent to 1.2 per cent of GDP.[6] In 2023, study permit holders surpassed 1 million in a country of just over 40 million people.[7]

This rapid, market-driven expansion reflected structural changes in the composition of the international student population of Canada. International student flows shifted from a peak concentration among Chinese nationals (accounting for 33% of enrolments in the mid-2010s) to a higher peak concentration among Indian nationals (comprising 41% in the post-pandemic period).[8] This shift was due to changing recruitment strategies, including the rise of private agent aggregator platforms that facilitated high-volume recruitment, and the explicit promotion of edugration pathways. Post-pandemic growth became increasingly concentrated in less-selective colleges (both public and private), and short-term diploma and certificate programmes aligned with minimum post-graduation work permit eligibility thresholds.[9] Because these institutions and programmes were primarily in major urban regions already experiencing population growth, the resulting compositional and spatial shifts heightened the visibility of international students in specific local contexts.

Beginning in 2022, system pressures became politicized, often independently of their underlying policy drivers. Media coverage and government statements highlighted cases of fraudulent admission letters, non-compliant institutions and exploitative recruitment practices, intensifying public scrutiny of the programme. As Canadian public support for immigration declined in 2023 and 2024, the Federal Government's own popularity waned, adding pressure to address what it characterized as "unsustainable growth and integrity issues" in the international student programme.[10] International students were increasingly reframed in public and political debate as contributors to housing and infrastructure pressures, despite broader, long-standing housing policy failures, as well as significant growth in other temporary migration streams.

This politicization culminated in the introduction of the first cap on study permit applications in Canada in January 2024. Spouse and post-graduation work eligibility were tightened, and immigration pathways for international students narrowed. This policy turn was rapid and politically charged, destabilizing post-secondary institutions and generating significant uncertainty among affected international students.

The policy pivot of Canada reflects an attempt to improve public confidence and better align student inflows with immigration objectives, labour-market demand and public capacity. Federal signals indicate a more selective approach to international student recruitment, focusing on labour market–linked pathways and students perceived to have high human capital (e.g. graduate students). Meanwhile, the reputation of Canada as an international education destination has been affected. Public higher education institutions are struggling to meet enrolment targets and grappling with a sharp decline in international student tuition revenue. In addition, hundreds of thousands of international students recruited during a period of expanded post-study work flexibility now face narrowed permanent residency pathways and heightened public scrutiny. Given the substantial

[6] Roslyn Kunin and Associates, Inc. "Economic impact of international education in Canada – An update of 2022 impact: Final report", Presented to Global Affairs Canada (Vancouver, Roslyn Kunin and Associates, Inc., 2023).

[7] Government of Canada, Temporary residents: Study permit holders – Monthly IRCC updates – Canada – Study permit holders on December 31st by country of citizenship (metadata last updated 18 May 2024).

[8] Ibid.

[9] Statistics Canada, n.d.

[10] Lisa Ruth Brunner, "Canadian international student policy at a crossroads", Policy brief No. 1 (Quebec, Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2025).

financial and opportunity costs these students have already incurred, it remains uncertain how many will depart Canada when their current permits expire, even in the absence of attainable permanent residency pathways.

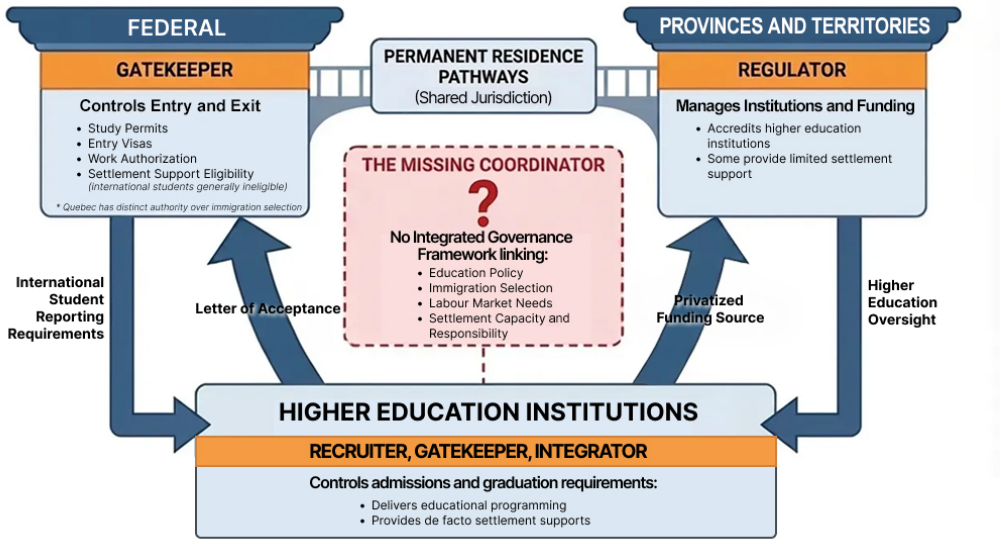
The experience of Canada offers important lessons for other countries experimenting with education-linked migration models. Consistent with patterns previously seen in Australia, it demonstrates how higher education institutions can come to function as de facto migration governance actors, yet without the governance frameworks required to manage scale, ethical implications and political risks.[11]

Fragmented governance

A central weakness in the international student model of Canada is the absence of an integrated governance framework linking education policy, immigration selection, labour-market needs and settlement capacity. Responsibility is distributed across multiple actors with overlapping but poorly aligned mandates.

In Canada, the Federal Government controls study permits, entry visas and work authorization (although Quebec holds distinct authority within its jurisdiction). Permanent residency pathways are jointly, though at times incongruently, shaped by federal and provincial governments. Provinces regulate post-secondary institutions and benefit fiscally from international enrolments, while individual institutions set international recruitment targets largely based on budgetary needs. In 2014, the Federal Government introduced a designated learning institution framework, which requires provinces to accredit schools to host international students.[12] However, provinces largely lacked mechanisms – and in some cases, motivation – to adequately monitor and address housing, education quality and student outcomes. No actor oversaw the system holistically (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The fragmented governance of the international student system of Canada



Source: Author's original elaboration based on Brunner, 2025.

[11] Lisa Ruth Brunner, Roopa Desai Trilokekar, Simon Morris-Lange, Helen Liu, Melissa Laufer, Amira El Masri and Anumoni Joshi, "Magnets, gatekeepers, surveillants, and refiners: The emergence of higher education institutions as migration governance actors in Australia, Canada, and Germany, 1990 to 2019", *International Journal of Educational Research*, 129:102490 (2025).

[12] Lisa Ruth Brunner, "Higher education institutions as eyes of the state: Canada's international student compliance regime", *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 21(2):236–251 (2023).

As a result, the federal international student policy of Canada relied on provincial and institutional self-regulation, as well as market signals, to manage scale and quality. In practice, these fragmented incentives encouraged volume over sustainability. Rapid expansion occurred without coordinated oversight, including advance planning for student housing supply, clarity around responsibility for settlement services, and alignment with labour-market absorption for students working during and after their studies.

When political and public pressure mounted, these governance weaknesses became visible. Multiple provincial governments and education-sector associations publicly criticized the Federal Government's unilateral introduction of study permit reforms in 2024.[13] Provinces and institutions were forced into reactive adjustments, revealing the lack of contingency planning and shared accountability. Rather than resolving coordination failures, this policy reset shifted the burden of adjustment costs downstream.

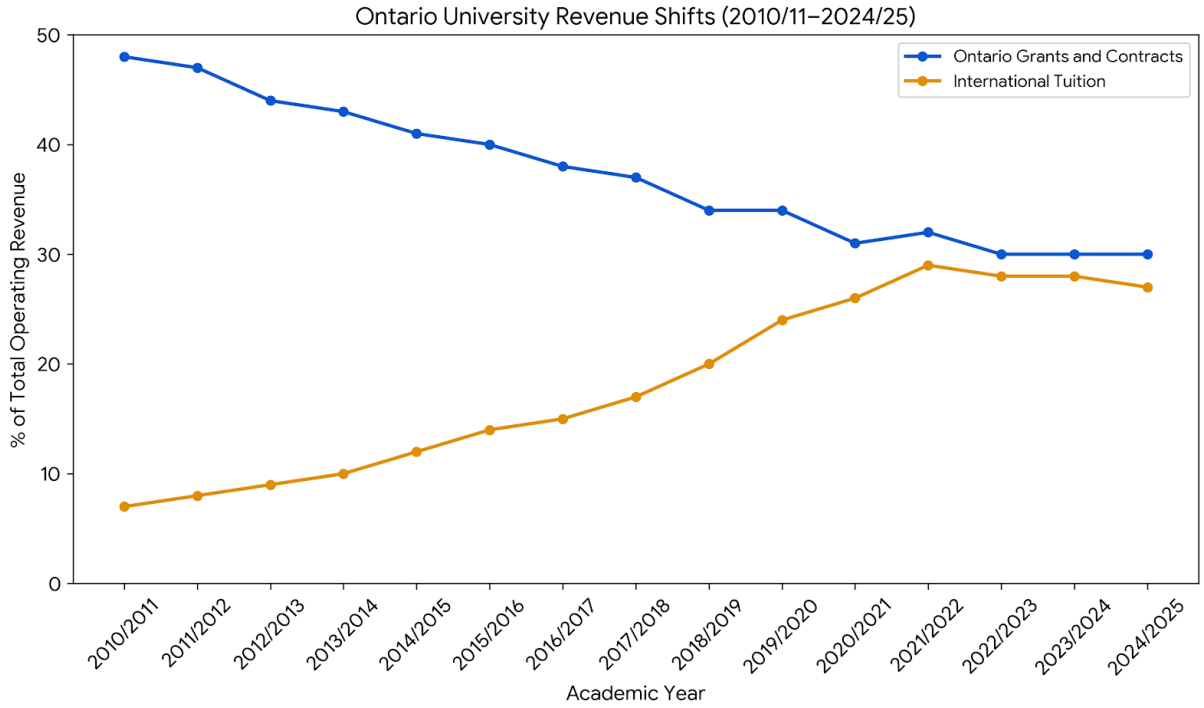
> **Policy lesson 1**: Education-based migration pathways require explicit system stewardship. When policy objectives and jurisdictional responsibilities are dispersed across multiple actors, governments must designate a coordinating authority to align enrolment planning, monitor downstream capacity (such as housing and settlement) and manage incremental policy adjustment. Without integrated governance, international student systems are likely to default to reactive policymaking driven by crisis.

Market dependence and institutional risk

The policy reset of Canada also showed the risks associated with tuition-driven internationalization of higher education. Over time, international student fees became a substitute for public investment in post-secondary education, which failed to keep pace with rising costs. In Ontario, the most populous province of Canada and its top international student destination, declining provincial grants were accompanied by growing reliance on international tuition as a proportion of university operating revenue, signalling a structural shift in how institutions financed core activities (Figure 2). This produced a funding model where institutions increasingly relied on international enrolments as a stabilizing, rather than supplementary, stream of revenue. The result was a higher education system whose financial viability became closely tied to sustained international student intake.

[13] Isaac Callan and Colin D'Mello, "Canada's immigration minister calls Ontario's international student claims 'garbage'", *Global News* (28 February 2024); Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), "CBIE statement on the IRCC announcement to cap international student study permits" (22 January 2024); Colleges and Institutes Canada, "Colleges and Institutes speak out on the community impact of international student policy reforms (25 November 2024).

Figure 2. International tuition as a substitute for declining provincial operating grants in Ontario universities (2010–2025)



Source: Council of Ontario Universities, COFO financial report of Ontario universities: Static reports, guidelines and highlights (n.d.).

This financial dependence had direct consequences for institutional behaviour. International student recruitment strategies intensified, often through private, third-party agents operating across jurisdictions with uneven oversight and accountability. Academic programme offerings expanded in ways closely aligned with post-graduation work eligibility rather than long-term educational or labour-market outcomes. As a result, international student intake grew in fields that did not correspond to areas of demonstrated Canadian labour-market demand, weakening the immigration policy rationale behind continued expansion. Particularly in regions experiencing the fastest institutional expansion, the pace of enrolment growth also overtook investments in quality assurance, student support services and local infrastructure.

From a migration policy perspective, a funding structure with institutional dependence also constrains policy flexibility. When higher education systems have a structural reliance on continuous inflows of temporary migrants, provincial governments face pressure to maintain high intake even if public support erodes. Conversely, abrupt policy tightening such as numerical caps risks triggering institutional instability, with financial consequences that spill into regional economies and local labour markets.

There is also a significant ethical dimension, with the costs associated with underfunded public education transferred onto international students largely from lower- and middle-income countries. Although some students achieve upward mobility through Canadian credentials,

international tuition revenue has become a hidden subsidy for domestic systems, raising questions about equity, transparency and the global distribution of educational risk without adequate safeguards.

> **Policy lesson 2:** Countries pursuing education-based migration pathways must address the political economy of higher education funding. Sustainable models require adequate public investment, enrolment guardrails and quality assurance mechanisms that prevent institutions from becoming financially dependent on temporary migrant inflows. When grounded in evidence, aligned with labour-market forecasts and embedded in long-term planning, migration policy can play a complementary and strategic role in broader economic and development objectives. However, it should not be used as a compensatory tool for chronic underfunding in post-secondary education.

Public consent and narrative volatility

A key driver of the international student reset of Canada is the loss of social licence. Rapid population growth rates concentrated in major urban centres collided with long-standing gaps in affordable housing provision and infrastructure planning. Within this context, international students – particularly those who were racialized – became a visible and politically convenient focal point in public debates about affordability and capacity. This allowed responsibility for structural housing and infrastructure pressures to be displaced away from underlying policy and governance failures and instead channelled into anti-international student and, in particular, anti-South Asian rhetoric in the public sphere.[14]

What is striking is the speed with which dominant narratives shifted. For years, international students have been framed as beneficial contributors to economic growth and future citizens. In 2021, the then-Minister of Immigration said: "Our message to international students and graduates is simple: We don't just want you to study here; we want you to stay here."[15] By 2023, the new Minister of Immigration described international education as a "back-door entry into Canada."[16] In this way, international students transformed discursively from policy solutions into policy problems.[17] This shift shaped policy responses as much as empirical assessments of system performance.

In Canada, this reversal coincided with post-pandemic unaffordability pressures and declining confidence in the incumbent government – an important context that may not be generalizable. However, education-based migration pathways in other countries have faced similar backlash after periods of expansion with limited public scrutiny. Australia, for example, has experienced a decades-long "policy pendulum" as the Government oscillates between loosened rules to capture economic benefits and sharp regulatory tightening to address unintended consequences like those in Canada.[18]

[14] Keith Neuman, "South Asian experiences with racism in Canada", Environics Institute for Survey Research (3 July 2025).

[15] Canada, Government of, "Government of Canada announces further measures to support international students", News release (12 February 2021).

[16] Christian Paas-Lang, "Integrity of immigration system at risk as international student numbers balloon, minister says", CBC/Radio-Canada (27 August 2023).

[17] Lisa Brunner and Roopa Desai Trilokekar, "International students as problems and solutions", University Affairs (27 August 2023).

[18] Harriet Spinks, "Overseas students: immigration policy changes 1997–2015", Research Paper Series Parliamentary Library (Australia Department of Parliamentary Services, 2016).

When scale becomes visible, international students can become framed in public discourse as politically salient temporary migrants who are denied the legitimacy – and protections – afforded to permanent residents. Research indicates that public reaction can be more sensitive to rapid acceleration in immigration than to simply high immigration levels. This applies to international students; stable support is observed during periods of gradual increase, while sharper opinion shifts more commonly emerged during periods of abrupt growth.

> **Policy lesson 3**: Public consent is not a downstream communications issue; it is a core policy constraint that must be actively maintained. Governments must invest in sustained public communication that explains the value of international students beyond short-term economic returns, including their social, demographic and innovation-related contributions. Clear and consistent narratives that humanize international students and situate edugration within broader demographic realities, such as ageing populations and labour-force renewal, are essential to maintaining social licence. This should ideally be accompanied by transparent enrolment targets and visible investments in student housing and services, which signal policy control and reinforce public trust.

Pathway opacity and reputational risk

A final failure in the education-linked migration model of Canada is the ambiguity in how permanent residency pathways were promoted and ultimately operated. Despite being explicitly courted as ideal future immigrants, the probability of an international student successfully transitioning to permanent status remained contingent and subject to frequent recalibration. Compounding this challenge was the fact that, over time, expectations formed under one policy environment were exposed to abrupt change under another.

Multistep migration systems can produce precarity when policy change is rapid or insufficiently transparent. In Canadian edugration, international students typically transition from study permits to temporary work authorization before competing in points-based selection systems. Through this years-long process, they remain vulnerable to shifting criteria, often after major financial and personal investments. When eligibility criteria suddenly tighten or pathways narrow, as they did in Canada, those already embedded in the system absorb the risk. The policy changes of Canada in 2024 – which narrowed post-graduation options for many students – show how policy volatility can undermine expectations formed under earlier policy signals.

This raises ethical concerns that extend beyond the case of Canada. Education-based migration pathways rely on deferred consent: students commit to life-altering investments based on future policy conditions they do not control. When governments and educational institutions benefit from student labour and international tuition revenue while offering limited clarity about long-term prospects, the burden of risk shifts disproportionately onto temporary migrants.

The reputational consequences of this are also significant. As the Canadian case now shows, utilizing marketized education as a

migration pathway without aligning messaging to realistic outcomes risks eroding trust among prospective students and sending countries, with consequences for credibility and institutional competitiveness as a study-abroad destination.

> **Policy lesson 4**: When education is positioned as a migration pathway, governments must ensure transparency and predictability to limit the extent to which policy volatility is absorbed by temporary migrants. This does not require guaranteeing permanent residency, but it does require transparent communication about probabilities, timelines and selection criteria, as well as multi-year policy commitments and guaranteed transition periods, to ensure students are not treated as disposable buffers in labour markets during periods of policy adjustment.

Beyond intake caps: Rethinking edugration governance

The international student reset of Canada illustrates both the promises and perils of edugration. It can, in theory, support economic growth, address demographic challenges and strengthen educational systems not only financially, but also by broadening intellectual horizons and deepening transnational engagement. Yet if expansion outpaces governance, edugration pathways can become politically unstable and reputationally fragile. Simply narrowing recruitment risks reproducing the same vulnerabilities at a smaller scale if education funding models, governance coordination and pathway transparency remain unaddressed. Durable reform requires rethinking how education, migration and public investments are jointly structured, rather than relying on intake controls alone.

For policymakers, the lesson is not necessarily to retreat from education-linked migration, but to approach it with greater foresight. This requires coordinated cross-sectoral governance, sustainable public higher education funding and proactive public communication. It may also require enforceable minimum standards for housing, student support and post-graduation outcomes tied to host institution eligibility, ensuring intake aligns with institutional quality and capacity. As is being done in several OECD States, international students should be treated as participants in long-term social projects, rather than provisional economic inputs or shock absorbers for policy miscalculation.

Education-based migration pathways carry political and international implications. Their credibility depends on sustained alignment between policy design, institutional capacity and public expectations. Where that alignment is actively maintained, edugration can remain a durable component of economic immigration systems. Where it is neglected, even celebrated systems can quickly lose legitimacy.

Vol. XV, Number 1, April 2026
MIGRATION POLICY PRACTICE 51

Streamlining migrant integration in Peru: The one-stop shop model of public–private Migracentros (2023–2026)

Nancy Helena Arellano Suárez and Luisa Feline Freier[1]

Introduction

Human mobility in Latin America, and specifically in Peru, has undergone a profound transformation. By the end of 2024, over 1.6 million Venezuelan citizens resided in Peru, consolidating its position as the second-largest recipient of this population globally and the leading destination for asylum-seekers under the Cartagena Declaration. Venezuelan immigration has thus transitioned from an acute, transient migratory phenomenon into a complex challenge of long-term structural integration.

Historically, the response of Peru to Venezuelan displacement was defined by a reactive "crisis management" approach, centred on regularization via temporary permits.[2] While granting legal status, this strategy failed to ensure effective integration into national welfare systems, generating a systemic disconnection. It also produced fragile legality and an integration limbo, where migrants possess documents but lack meaningful access to basic services and the formal labour market. This vacuum perpetuates migrant vulnerability and generates social friction with receiving communities.

The Migracentro project emerged as an institutional disruption to this scenario. As public–private–civil society one-stop shops, they consolidate key administrative procedures and essential services – from legal assistance to health and employment referrals – into a single interface. This design makes services highly coordinated and navigable for both refugees and migrants, as well as the host population.[3]

This study evaluates the operational and sociopolitical impact of the Migracentro model (2023–2026) of Peru. Using mixed methods, the article examines how shared governance and user-centred design enabled over 450,000 comprehensive service interventions, improved case traceability, reduced transaction costs and supported *arraigo* – a sense of belonging. The model's evolution into a national public good is further analysed, highlighted by the finding that 82 per cent of recent users were Peruvian citizens. Finally, an institutional pathway to embed a human mobility one-stop shop is proposed within the *Centros de Mejor Atención al Ciudadano* (MAC or Centres for Improved Citizen Service), a citizen service centre model under the

[1] Nancy H. Arellano Suárez is a Specialist in Public Policy Articulation and an Associate Researcher at the *Centro de Investigación de la Universidad del Pacífico* in Lima, Peru. She also leads the integration programme of the Peruvian non-governmental organization, *Centro de Información y Educación para la Prevención del Abuso de Drogas* (CEDRO). Her work supports State efforts to ensure safe and orderly migration. Luisa Feline Freier holds the Chair of Political Science with a focus on Latin America at the Freie Universität Berlin in Germany. She is the Founding Director of Canada's International Development Research Center Chair on Forced Displacement in Latin America at the Universidad del Pacífico in Lima, Peru. Her research focuses on migration and refugee policies in Latin America, South–South migration and the Venezuelan displacement crisis.

[2] In January 2017, Peru implemented the *Permiso Temporal de Permanencia* (Supreme Decree No. 002-2017-IN). Initially covering those present before 2 February 2017, the programme was expanded in successive phases to include entrants up to 31 October 2018, with applications accepted until 31 December 2018. Subsequent measures – including special regularization processes and the *Carné de Permiso Temporal de Permanencia* – introduced in 2020 and relaunched in 2023 sought to address ongoing irregularity. These sequential, time-bound programmes reflect a reactive rather than comprehensive migration policy framework.

[3] Peru, Government of, MIGRACIONES, Cedro e Intercorp firman convenio interinstitucional para instalar primer "Migracentro" [MIGRACIONES, CEDRO and Intercorp sign an inter-institutional agreement to install the first "Migracentro"], Press release (5 October 2022) (in Spanish).

Presidencia del Consejo de Ministros (PCM or Council of Ministers), aligning implementation with the National Policy for Development and Social Inclusion 2030 and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

Conceptual framework

Conceived by civil society – most notably under the leadership of CEDRO – and developed in coordination with the National Superintendency of Migration (SNM) and private sector partners such as Real Plaza, the Migracentro model advances a multi-stakeholder governance approach. Rather than reproducing a traditional border control paradigm, it reorients migration governance towards social cohesion and multidimensional security. In doing so, it speaks to a broader international policy trend, as one-stop-shop arrangements for migrant reception and integration have been developed across multiple national contexts, reflecting a broader trend towards the integration of services in single access points.[4]

Within this framework, integration becomes the principal mechanism through which the State renders migrant populations legible to public institutions and welfare systems. By creating clear pathways to services, the Migracentro model reduces transaction costs for both users and public authorities. It also enables more accurate collection of biometric and administrative data, thereby strengthening traceability across the systems underpinning social and economic integration.

In this sense, the model functions as a governance laboratory that gives operational expression to the rights to identity and welfare recognized in Article 2 of the Political Constitution of Peru.[5] Based on operational evidence collected through January 2026, the governance of human mobility can serve as a strategic instrument for institutional resilience and public order, while generating benefits for both citizens and migrant populations.

Here, security is understood not as the exclusion of the migrant, but as the formal registration and incorporation.[6] This aligns with the people-centred notion of human security, which shifts the referent of security from territory to persons and emphasizes protection from chronic threats and disruptive shocks in everyday life – precisely the vulnerabilities that integrated documentation, service access and protection pathways seek to reduce.

The new public management approach and the one-stop shop policy

The one-stop shop model is embedded in the principles of new public management, which seeks to reduce bureaucracy by centralizing user-oriented services. In traditional migration governance, institutional fragmentation is the most significant barrier to integration. A migrant typically faces a bureaucratic labyrinth, having to interact with multiple disconnected agencies to verify their identity, health status, educational background and labour rights. This fragmentation is not only cost-inefficient for the State but also

[4] See Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *International Migration Outlook 2025*, 49th edition (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2025). The Peruvian Migracentro distinguishes itself through its simultaneous multi-stakeholder governance structure involving the State, the private sector, civil society and international cooperation. Crucially, the active participation of migrant-led organizations in service design constitutes a distinct functional advantage, one that has endowed the model with heightened institutional resilience, particularly evident in its capacity to sustain operations amid the contraction of international cooperation funding experienced throughout 2025.

[5] As conceptualized by James C. Scott in *Seeing Like a State* (Yale University Press, 1998), State efficacy relies on making populations administratively legible. Regularization is thus a critical planning tool for public services.

[6] Organization of American States, Declaration on Security in the Americas (28 October 2003); United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994). This framework posits that threats such as informality and organized crime are best mitigated through an identified and integrated citizenry rather than marginalized populations.

distorts the reality of migratory flows, as the Government loses the ability to see the whole person.

The one-stop-shop model addresses this challenge by centralizing these administrative touchpoints. Conceptually, this design is based on Principle 3 of the Migration Governance Framework (MiGOF), which requires strong partnerships among the State, the private sector and civil society for effective management. Crucially, this multi-stakeholder dynamic also operationalizes the whole-of-society approach, which is established as a core guiding principle of the Global Compact for Migration to ensure that migration governance remains broadly inclusive and collaborative.

The model further sustains two critical operational pillars:

(a) Whole-of-government approach: Aligned with both MiGOF Principle 2 and the Global Compact of Migration's whole-of-government guiding principle, Migracentro seeks to ensure that migration policy is evidence-based and involves all relevant ministries and levels of administration to advance the general interests of the State.

(b) Interoperable efficiency: Following the ALíA kit of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the model posits that administrative efficiency resides not in the rigidity of physical border control, but in the secure interoperability of information. This focus on data integration aligns directly with the Global Compact Migration's objectives, particularly the mandate to collect and use accurate, disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies (Objective 1) and provide coordinated access to basic services (Objective 15).

Beyond administrative simplification, the one-stop-shop logic serves as an integration-enabling institutional design. By reducing fragmentation, it strengthens the structural facilitators of integration (rules, information and access channels) that ultimately determine whether formal legal status translates into effective socioeconomic inclusion. In this sense, Migracentro operationalizes integration not merely as a rights-based outcome, but as a governance mechanism that reduces transaction costs for both users and the public administration, an effect frequently associated with one-stop shops when they are designed around user journeys and cross-agency coordination.

To translate this conceptual framework into practice, IDB proposed the ALíA kit, which emphasizes that the effectiveness of migratory services relies on the interoperability and security of administrative data. This approach is vital for combating labour informality, which has reached critical levels in Peru due to administrative barriers that prevent employers from verifying the validity of migratory documents. Ultimately, the adaptation of the ALíA model and the Migration Heptagon facilitated the development of the *arraigo* pathways.

The Migration Heptagon and the route to belonging

The Migration Heptagon (Table 1) represents the operational architecture guiding migrants' transition to full inclusion. Unlike linear models, the Heptagon proposes concurrent dimensions that must be addressed simultaneously to achieve territorial belonging (*arraigo*).

Strategic dimensions

Table 1. The Migration Heptagon

Strategic dimension	Function in integration	Impact on arraigo
Identity	Biometric registration and issuance of foreign cards.	Foundation of legality and State visibility.
Protection	Access to justice and risk prevention (trafficking, violence).	Guarantees physical integrity and the rule of law.
Formative accreditation	Validation of degrees and certification of competencies.	Enables social mobility and leverage of human capital.
Livelihoods	Formal labour insertion and entrepreneurship support.	Engine of economic autonomy and fiscal contribution.
Sociocultural	Interculturality and social cohesion programmes.	• Reduces xenophobia and fosters a sense of belonging. • Integration research frequently highlights the role of social networks and social capital in shaping refugees and migrants' trajectories, affecting access to information, opportunities and a sense of belonging.
Civic participation*	Exercise of citizen rights and duties.	Empowers migrants as social actors in the community.
Financial inclusion	Access to bank accounts, credit and insurance.	Sustainability of the life project in the host country.

Source: Author's own elaboration.
Note: * The granting of municipal voting rights to foreigners (Art. 31) serves as a mechanism for local citizenship, acknowledging that residents contribute to the community regardless of nationality.

The Heptagon is consistent with the integration literature that treats successful integration as inherently multidomain and shaped by both outcomes (such as access and achievement in employment, housing, education and health) and enabling conditions (citizenship/rights, social connections and structural barriers). Conceptually, the Heptagon translates these domains into an operational service architecture: (a) identity and protection secure legibility and rule-of-law safeguards; (b) accreditation and livelihoods connect human capital to formal labour markets; (c) sociocultural and civic participation target social connections and local citizenship; and (d) financial inclusion addresses a frequently under-specified but decisive condition for sustaining a long-term life project in the society. These dimensions also operationalize a social capital mechanism: sustained social networks, trust and participation can facilitate access to opportunities and reinforce integration trajectories beyond legal status alone.

Methodological framework

The model's theory of change links administrative design directly to structural integration. In the short term, the one-stop shop reduces transaction costs, improves State legibility through biometric capture and increases access to welfare systems. Over time, these intermediate outcomes foster social cohesion and reduce the vulnerabilities linked to informality. Consequently, the model functions not only as a migrant-facing innovation but as a national public good that builds broader institutional resilience.

This evaluation employed a descriptive–analytical case study design with a mixed-methods approach. The database analysed comprises administrative records from the Migracentros' Management Information System collected between July 2023[7] and January 2026.

- **Data sources:** Secondary data from the operational management reports of CEDRO Peru and SNM.
- **Unit of analysis:** Comprehensive service interventions performed in Lima and provincial nodes (Ica, among others), categorized according to the seven dimensions of the Heptagon.[8]
- **Processing:** A service concurrence analysis was conducted to determine the reach percentage of each dimension within the universe of served individuals.
- **Limitations:** The study acknowledges that, as operational data, there is bias towards the population already willing to formalize, excluding migration nuclei in situations of structural irregularity or transit.

Analysis of operational results (2023–2026)

Administrative data reveal high demand for integrated public services: as of 31 January 2026, the centres performed a total of 458,613 comprehensive service interventions. This figure represents total service contacts rather than unique individuals; with an average of two visits per person, the model has effectively served approximately 229,300 unique users.

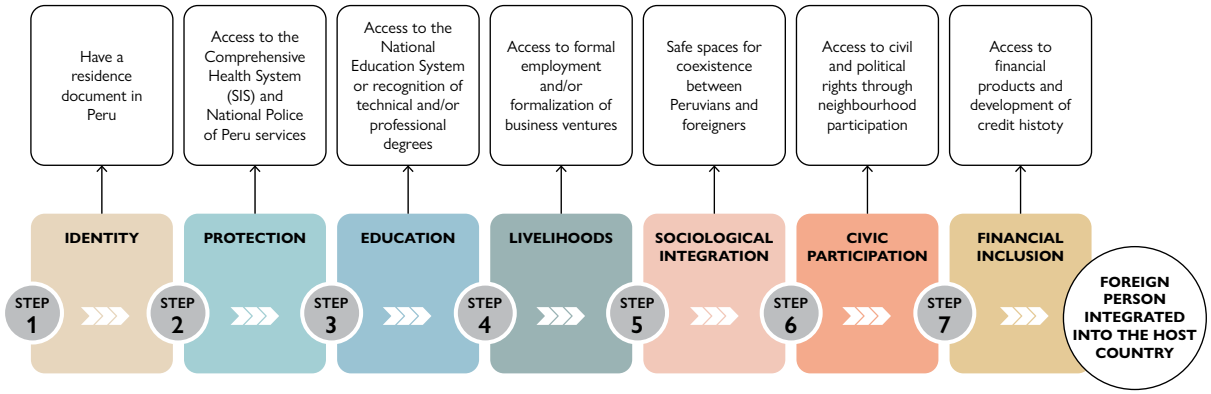
Demographic and geographic data show the model reaches a diverse population seeking holistic solutions. Women account for majority of the interventions (65% versus 35% men); while 80 per cent of users are adults, 20 per cent are minors under 18. Geographically, operations are heavily concentrated in Lima (90% of total interventions), with Ica accounting for the remaining 10 per cent following its operational launch in early 2026.

To contextualize how these diverse user profiles navigate the integrated service provision, Figure 2 illustrates the standard operational workflow of a Migracentro visit, from initial triage to cross-agency referral and follow-up.

[7] The Migracentro concept was originally developed by the Integration Directorate at CEDRO as part of the *Chance para Sumar* project, in collaboration with the Government of the United States of America (USAID/State). This conceptual framework, developed by Veneactiva (a migrant organization) and CEDRO (a host community ally) since 2019, emerged from a diagnostic assessment of economic integration failures and the systemic barriers preventing migrants from navigating the Peruvian institutional landscape. Following strategic coordination with SNM, the model secured multifaceted support from IDB. It adopts a person-centred approach: while 80 per cent of users are adults (men and women), a significant portion (20%) are minors, with women comprising 65 per cent of the total population served. The implementation of the inaugural site in the populous district of Ate, located at Real Plaza Puruchuco, was made possible through a high-level partnership with Intercorp and its subsidiary, Real Plaza. This initiative established a one-stop-shop service model within high-traffic commercial spaces, supported by the cooperation of the Government of Canada, the European Union (via GIZ) and Israel.

[8] The Migration Heptagon builds on the wider literature that conceptualizes integration across multiple domains, notably Ager and Strang's framework of 10 key domains structured around markers and means, social connections and structural facilitators. This article adapts such multidimensional approaches to the Andean context by explicitly adding financial inclusion and civic participation as distinct operational axes.

Figure 2. Migracentro workflow



Source: Author's own elaboration.

Impact by dimension and concurrence

While identity remains the driving axis of the model – serving as the primary gateway for 100 per cent of the interventions – the convergence of other services underscores the gradual maturation of the one-stop-shop design (see Table 2).

Table 2. Impact by integration dimension and service concurrence

Integration dimension	Total service interventions*	Reach (%)**
Identity	458,613	100.00
Protection	2,297	0.50
Livelihoods	10,230	2.23
Other dimensions	153,297	33.43
Total comprehensive interventions	458,613	100.00

Notes: *Percentage of total interventions; services are concurrent.
**Includes accreditation, sociocultural, civic and financial integration.
Source: CEDRO, Operational Management Report: Migracentro Model 2023–2026 (Management Information System) (2026) (internal document/dashboards; available upon request).

Table 2 shows lower concurrence in protection (0.50%) and livelihoods (2.23%). This reflects the gradual integration of services rather than low demand. While identity operates at full capacity under a stable agreement with SNM, incorporating secondary services requires complex inter-agency arrangements that have been delayed by political instability. As these institutional agreements stabilize, concurrent service delivery will scale proportionally.

Migracentros as a national public good

A surprising and highly significant finding for public policy design is that, by 2025, 82 per cent of new beneficiaries (98,796 individuals) utilizing the Migracentros are Peruvian citizens. This high rate of national utilization is primarily driven by the integration of passport issuance services with SNM.

This dynamic reflects a core strategic component of the National Migration Policy of Peru, which formally recognizes the country's enduring status as an origin country for migrants. By extending Migracentro services to Peruvians with the intention to emigrate, the State actively promotes safe, orderly and regular migration for its own nationals from the point of departure. This operational reality substantiates the theory that an administrative mechanism initially designed to streamline immigrant integration can evolve into a comprehensive public good. Serving both immigrants and prospective emigrants under a single roof physicalizes social cohesion, aligns with MiGOF Objective 1 (which emphasizes advancing the socioeconomic well-being of both migrants and host societies) and ultimately curtails xenophobia by ensuring the destination community also derives tangible institutional value from the service infrastructure.

Limitations: Symbolic protection versus real integration

Despite operational progress, the Migracentro model operates in an environment of "symbolic protection".[9] This concept describes the incorporation of rights as signalling values (such as commitment to human rights) rather than actually delivering protection, and is crucial for understanding why administrative efficiency does not always translate into immediate socioeconomic well-being. On the one hand, Peru has fallen into a trap of normative liberalism: the State grants the foreigner an identification card, but the market and secondary bureaucracy often reject it in practice. In addition, structural barriers, such as labour-market informality rates that exceed 70 per cent, legislative limitations and the lacking validation of degrees, persist.[10] On the other hand, an increasingly securitized approach to immigration control pushes the population towards irregularity, both in terms of irregular entry and fear of approaching State institutions.[11]

Policy recommendations

The evolution of the Migracentro model is proposed into a specialized human mobility one-stop shop embedded within the national MAC citizen service centres and administered by PCM. Drawing on evidence from similar integration hubs in Latin America (such as Centros Intégrate of Colombia and Oriana Jara Reference Centre for Immigrants of Brazil), this institutionalization pathway depends on several enabling conditions that determine whether administrative efficiency becomes real integration rather than mere symbolic protection.[12]

To bridge the gap between formal legal status and structural inclusion, policy implementation must focus on three thematic areas:

- Data interoperability and whole-of-government planning: Administrative traceability must transcend isolated operational records. Migracentro data should be systematically integrated to inform resourced public service responses across the health, education and labour sectors.

[9] Omar Hammoud-Gallego and Luisa Feline Freier, "Symbolic refugee protection: Explaining Latin America's liberal refugee laws", *American Political Science Review*, 117(2):454–473 (2023).

[10] The law (DL 689) on hiring migrant workers limits foreign personnel to 20 per cent of the workforce and 30 per cent of the payroll, creating a systemic disincentive to legal hiring.

[11] L.F. Freier, *En el umbral: Desafíos de la integración venezolana en el Perú* [*On the Threshold: Challenges of Venezuelan Integration in Peru*] (Universidad del Pacífico, 2023) (in Spanish).

[12] This proposal resonates with the literature on the local turn and multilevel governance in migrant integration, which highlights that durable integration outcomes emerge when national strategies, subnational authorities and local service hubs are jointly coordinated. Embedding human mobility within the MAC system of PCM aims precisely at institutionalizing such multilevel, cross-sectoral coordination, including local forms of social citizenship (OECD, Multi-level governance for migrant integration: Policy instruments from Austria, Canada, France, Germany and Italy, OECD Regional Development Paper (Paris, OECD, 2022)).

- Labour market and credential recognition reform: Without dismantling strict statutory quotas on foreign hiring and expediting degree validation processes, legal identity will continue to face secondary bureaucracy, effectively neutralizing the livelihoods pathway.
- Multilevel governance coordination: Sustained coordination is required to align national legislative frameworks with local service delivery and community-level integration measures. This aligns with multilevel governance approaches that emphasize coordinated institutional arrangements for effective migrant integration.

To operationalize these recommendations, the implementation of a MAC mobility model should be structured around two strategic pillars:

(a) **Transversal governance**: Moving policy to PCM ensures it is viewed as modernization and social development rather than just internal order.

(b) **Bidirectional management**: MAC mobility would serve four critical profiles:
   (i) Migrant integration: Continuity of regularization.
   (ii) Returned Peruvians: Operationalizing Law No. 30001 (Law for the Economic and Social Reintegration of the Returned Migrant) for rapid economic reinsertion.
   (iii) Emigrating Peruvians: Informed migration services.
   (iv) Prevention of regional irregular migration: Linked to social inclusion programmes (Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion).

Conclusion

The evaluation of the Migracentro model (2023–2026) demonstrates that Peru has created a governance laboratory of international relevance. By establishing an operational partnership across the State, the private sector and civil society, the model has efficiently processed hundreds of thousands of interventions, effectively transforming an acute humanitarian response mechanism into a national public good.

However, the pathway to structural inclusion by 2030 requires sustained political commitment. To move definitively beyond symbolic protection, the State must address entrenched secondary bureaucracy by reforming restrictive labour statutes (such as Legislative Decree No. 689, Law on the Hiring of Foreigners) and expediting the validation of professional and academic credentials. Institutionalizing the model through the proposed MAC mobility framework under PCM is critical to ensure migration is governed through a lens of social development and State resilience, rather than an exclusively police-centric paradigm.

Ultimately, socioeconomic integration is a strategic mechanism for State capacity-building. In an era of complex mobility, effective governance requires frameworks capable of integrating immigrants, orienting emigrants and reincorporating returning nationals. By advancing these capacities, the Migracentro aligns directly with Global Compact for Migration's Objectives 7, 15 and 16. Consolidating this model as a permanent foundation for a new, inclusive Peruvian social citizenship remains the critical next step.

Vol. XV, Number 1, April 2026
MIGRATION POLICY PRACTICE 59

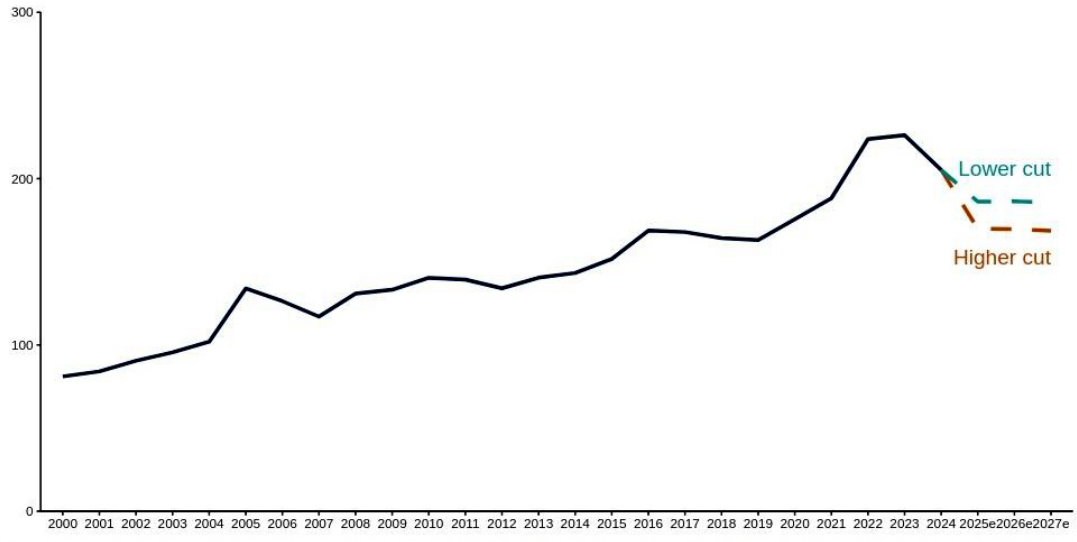
Beyond aid: The enduring role of diasporas across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus

Fabrizia Camplone and Anna Valtolina[1]

Introduction

The year 2025 has been marked by profound transformation in international development and humanitarian action. Besides making headlines, the disengagement from multilateral cooperation by the administration of the United States of America has generated ripple effects at all levels, with a disproportionate impact on beneficiaries. However, this has only accelerated the existing trend of declining official development assistance (ODA) from major donors. Data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicate that, after an overall 6 per cent increase between 2018 and 2023, in 2024, "for the first time in nearly 30 years, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States all cut their ODA",[2] resulting in a 9 per cent decrease compared to the previous year. As shown in Figure 1, ODA is projected to fall by a further 10 to 18 per cent by 2027. In 2024, the European Union also had already planned an overall EUR 2 billion cut (approximately 7.48%) across all programmes, including EUR 39 million from funds for civil society organizations.[3]

Figure 1. Trends in total official development assistance from Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries, 2000–2024 and 2025–2027 (projections), in USD billion



Source: OECD, 2025:4

[1] Fabrizia Camplone is the Focal Point for Diaspora Engagement and Mainstreaming Migration for the Migration Development Unit at the IOM Coordination Office for the Mediterranean, where she coordinates the design and delivery of capacity-building initiatives for diaspora communities and local authorities. Anna Valtolina is a Junior Project Assistant for the Migration Development Unit at the IOM Coordination Office for the Mediterranean, focusing on diaspora engagement activities, project development, research, and monitoring and evaluation.

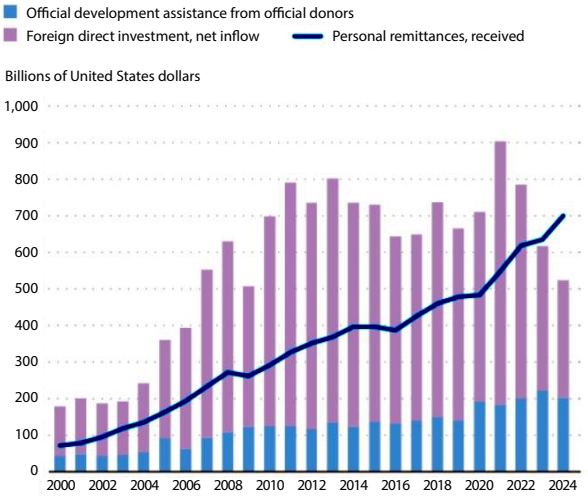
[2] OECD, "Cuts in official development assistance: OECD projections for 2025 and the near term", Policy brief (Paris, OECD, 2025).

[3] Federation of International Christian-Inspired Volunteer Organizations, "La cooperazione nella revisione del bilancio UE" ["Cooperation in the review of the EU budget"] (3 January 2025) (in Italian).

This progressive reorientation of donors' strategic priorities towards security, border management and migration governance has led to a reallocation of funds away from traditional multilateral cooperation in favour of bilateral relations between States, at the expense of civil society actors. In Italy as well, ten years after the formal recognition of civil society and diaspora organizations as official actors in international cooperation – including during emergencies and reconstruction – under Law 125/2014, and two years after the launch of the Mattei Plan for Africa, more emphasis is placed on bilateral cooperation, partnerships with the private sector and infrastructure development.[4]

Against this backdrop, this article explores the transformative role of diasporic communities in response to the legitimacy crisis of multilateralism, demonstrating the tangible impact of their engagement as partners in international cooperation. Diasporas are generally recognized as sources of remittances, which have shown steady growth and proven critical particularly in response to crises, becoming the primary alternative to declining public aid. As highlighted in Figure 2, since 2023, officially recorded remittances alone exceed the combined total of ODA and foreign direct investment flows to developing countries, demonstrating diasporas' sustained commitment to their origin countries. Additionally, diaspora contribution to peacebuilding and humanitarian action in countries of origin is widely acknowledged, as is their pivotal role in fostering economic, social and cultural development.

Figure 2. Remittance, official development assistance and foreign direct investment flows to low- and middle-income countries



Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Developments in global remittance flows and implications for sustainable development", Monthly briefing No. 196 (November 2025).

Drawing on key informant interviews with representatives of 11 Italy-based diaspora organizations participating in the IOM capacity-building subgranting initiative A.MI.CO.,[5] this article reflects on the effects of funding reductions on the activities and capacities of diaspora actors and their adaptation strategies. Their testimonies complement insights shared at the 2025 conference titled Building Bridges: Diaspora Engagement in the Humanitarian, Development and Peace Nexus (HDPN), hosted by IOM in Rome,[6] and enrich existing literature with concrete examples of diaspora resilience,

[4] Openpolis, "Poca cooperazione nella legge di bilancio" [Limited resources for development cooperation on the budget law] (13 December 2024) (in Italian).

[5] The A.MI.CO. programme of IOM Italy is designed to support diaspora-led co-development and humanitarian projects between Italy and their countries of origin. A comprehensive overview of the initiatives under the A.MI.CO. programme (launched in 2011) and an interactive report showcasing the data collected and analysed on the diaspora organizations involved are available at IOM, Diaspora engagement. The evolution over five years of Italy-based diaspora organizations after participating in the A.MI.CO. programme is also available in Marcella Pasotti (ed.), *A.MI.CO. Impact: Tracing the Evolution of Italy-based Diaspora Organizations* (Rome, IOM, 2025).

[6] The outcomes of the conference were published in Fabrizia Camplone, *Taking Stock: from Insight to Impact – Diaspora Engagement in the Humanitarian, Development and Peace Nexus (HDPN)* (Rome, IOM, 2025).

showing that granting them agency can truly make a difference across HDPN.

Between commitment and constraint: Lived challenges of diasporic actors

The interview findings indicate diverse challenges arising from recent financial cutbacks, which vary according to prior partnership arrangements, operational capacities and levels of professionalization.

Most diaspora organizations reported being affected by international circumstances, forcing them to interrupt or scale down ongoing initiatives in their countries of origin, whether managed directly from Italy or through partner organizations abroad. Decisions to close overseas branches – primarily due to insufficient financial resources required for continued operations – highlight the considerable pressures facing these organizations, many of which previously relied on funding from Italy for financial management. These closures have also affected their credibility with beneficiaries and institutions in affiliated countries, thereby limiting their capacity to pursue new partnerships and donor opportunities.

In times of limited financial resources, reliance on voluntary labour remains a central coping strategy across organizations, enabling continuity despite shrinking budgets. This is particularly problematic in Italy, where, in optimal scenarios, only a single staff member receives partial project-based compensation and reverts to volunteering upon project completion. Professional and personal obligations adversely affect work quality and contribute to increased diaspora fatigue, limiting their ability to grow institutionally or expand their operational scope. Furthermore, women-led organizations noted an additional layer of intersectional burdens that render sustained engagement even more demanding. These dynamics hinder the professionalization of diaspora organizations – a recurrent theme in the interviews. Many emphasized that the presence of even a single paid project officer would substantially improve diaspora organizations' ability to ensure continuity, accountability and long-term planning.

Reduced funding has also affected activities carried out within Italy. Many organizations observed that, without basic support from long-standing partners, such as municipalities, universities and foundations, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain essential services and initiatives for migrant communities. This, in turn, risks weakening community engagement, visibility and opportunities to foster integration. Although many interviewed diaspora organizations are aware of alternative funding streams, they frequently encounter structural barriers in accessing them. Mechanisms such as crowdfunding, the 5x1,000 scheme and broader community-based fundraising typically require robust administrative capacity and well-established supporter networks – features that smaller or multinational organizations without a specific national community of reference in Italy often lack. These financial challenges have been further exacerbated by shifts in donor priorities, reducing funding for areas seen as less urgent – such as civic participation or creative industries – while rising global inflation further erodes project budgets and complicates effective planning and delivery.

Notably, the interviews also revealed that some diaspora organizations suffered less from funding cuts, mainly because they were accustomed to operating with limited financial resources and relying on their own resources. However, this underscores how persistent structural barriers

to international cooperation continue to weigh heavily on diaspora organizations. Although these organizations did not experience significant reductions in their budget, they noted that institutional donors – facing reduced resources themselves – have made funding harder to obtain by introducing additional bureaucratic requirements, such as requesting financial guarantees or bank sureties. Such obligations are particularly challenging for smaller, volunteer-run organizations with limited administrative support, further restricting their ability to participate in calls for funding.

At the same time, competition with larger and more established – often non-diasporic – civil society organizations has intensified. These actors generally benefit from stronger management systems, deeper familiarity with the Italian institutional landscape and more resilient organizational structures that enable them to meet donor expectations more easily. Moreover, increasing co-funding requirements represent an additional financial barrier for smaller organizations, whose resources are already stretched. These challenges are especially pronounced for diaspora organizations based in Southern Italy, where fewer opportunities from local authorities and long-standing structural inequalities further restrict access to funding and civic participation.

Diaspora-led solutions: Partnerships and community ownership

Amid these challenges, the interviews revealed several adaptive strategies grounded not only in diasporas' long-standing ties with their communities of origin, but also in their partnerships with local and national authorities in both Italy and countries of intervention. These relationships further strengthen the diaspora organizations' stature as bridge builders across borders.

The deep personal ties between diasporas and their origin communities are not only the primary driver of engagement, but also the foundation for building trust-based partnerships and long-term collaboration, especially in volatile contexts.[7] This trust capital supports conflict-sensitive action, helps identify legitimate local partners, and reduces the risk of grievances by ensuring that initiatives are perceived as fair and community-driven, thereby fostering social cohesion. Interviewees reflecting on projects supported through the A.MI.CO. subgranting mechanism noted that contextual knowledge was essential for developing effective responses in synergy with affected and target communities, accounting for local capacities and priorities. Such relationships enable diaspora organizations to identify reliable partners capable of sustaining activities independently beyond the scope of the project and even without external support, which has proven crucial amid the current decline in official financing flows.

At the same time, these trust-based partnerships are key to the success of innovative adaptation strategies. Faced with limited possibilities of professionalization and expansion, organizations have learned to design projects with revenue-generating components. In Limbe, Cameroon, a nursery for children affected by the Anglophone crisis – which was set up through the diaspora-led project – is now funded by a vegetable garden managed by their mothers. In Louga, Senegal, where climate change has reduced rainfall, a women's agricultural cooperative sustains itself by selling chicks from a project-

[7] Alan Gamlen and Anurug Chakma, "Trusted intermediaries? The role of diasporas in humanitarian assistance", *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 117:105212 (2025).

established communal garden. The viability of these self-sustaining mechanisms relies on the active involvement and collective capacities of local partners and beneficiaries, essential for their sustainability. Many diaspora organizations have also strengthened small-scale self-financing practices through membership fees, monetary and in-kind donations and fundraising events, such as dinners, cultural festivals, benefit concerts or project presentations followed by appeals for donations. Together with contributions from diaspora communities abroad, these efforts help sustain activities despite shrinking institutional funding.

One particularly notable example concerns a diaspora organization whose work prompted the community in Senegal to establish a locally managed crowdfunding platform. Through this mechanism, the community was able to raise the funds needed to repair the local water tank, with financial oversight entrusted to the community leader. Another interviewee highlighted how the impact of their community gardens project in Ecuador extended beyond economic benefits: the female beneficiaries formed a support group to address family and administrative matters, raise awareness about rights and duties within the household, and empower themselves as citizens.

These grass-roots networks – recognized as the added value of diasporas in international cooperation – extend beyond the implementation of individual projects. They are cultivated for years through the sustained involvement of diaspora members in issues concerning their communities of origin. The interviews revealed a pattern whereby participation in funding calls becomes functional to the realization or upscaling of activities already identified as priorities in synergy with local communities, and often under way. This seems to be an exception among international cooperation stakeholders, where the prevailing approach is to tailor project objectives and priorities to align with the specific requirements of each call. Such diaspora model of co-design allows organizations to optimize resources, while remaining coherent with their objectives and broader vision of change, making them trustworthy actors in development and humanitarian action. By grounding interventions in locally recognized priorities and shared responsibilities, co-design strengthens legitimacy and reduces perceptions of external imposition, fostering practices of cooperation and dialogues that endure beyond individual projects. Positive impacts in origin communities therefore extend beyond tangible outputs to include stronger local organizations, improved trust in community leadership and enhanced collective capacity to manage shocks.

Finally, due to the success of their development activities and emergency responses over the years, diaspora organizations have been increasingly recognized as a central partner for Italian cooperation, especially by local authorities both in Italy and in the countries of intervention.

Conclusion

The insights emerging from the interviews highlight that, despite the mounting pressures caused by shrinking financial resources, diaspora organizations continue to demonstrate remarkable adaptability and commitment to their transnational engagement. However, the findings underscore that this resilience is neither automatic nor cost-free. In this context, structured support programmes such as A.MI.CO. of IOM Italy play a decisive role in strengthening the ability of diaspora actors to

withstand periods of uncertainty and sustain their contributions across the HDPN.

A central added value of A.MI.CO. lies in the organizational development and technical assistance provided throughout project implementation. For many organizations, this support introduced clearer structures and tools for monitoring, accounting and project management – areas that had previously relied heavily on informal practices. The programme's capacity-building approach during monitoring visits proved particularly valuable, as joint technical sessions between IOM staff and partner organizations helped clarify project frameworks and roles, strengthen collaboration with local actors and improve accountability, ultimately reducing operational challenges.

Another strong feature of the programme is its flexibility, which enabled diaspora organizations to adapt activities to evolving contexts, innovate and capitalize on learning opportunities – an aspect widely regarded as essential in volatile environments. Innovative tech-enabled solutions have been considered by diaspora organizations as coping strategies to maintain ongoing activities despite funding cuts. For instance, telehealth services could facilitate exchanges between Italy and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, replacing in-person consultations with medical doctors. Additionally, distance learning has been proposed for nomadic populations affected by internal displacement in Somalia. Collaboration with IOM also enhanced credibility and visibility in both Italy and countries of intervention. For some, this recognition translated into renewed engagement with associations and with local and national authorities, positioning them as points of reference within their communities and generating new networks.

Importantly, the programme also strengthened the capacity of diaspora actors to access external funding. For some groups, participation in A.MI.CO. bolstered their ability to prepare competitive project proposals; for others, it provided the experience needed to meet the eligibility requirements of public tenders. In a broader sense, the initiative restored confidence in the cooperation system and encouraged diaspora organizations to re-engage with it.

Finally, the interviews shed light on the ambiguous implications of localization for small- and medium-sized diaspora organizations. While diasporic actors are often regarded as key contributors to locally driven cooperation, they reported that strict interpretations of localization – particularly those directing nearly all resources to activities abroad – leave limited room to cover essential project management costs or compensate staff. For organizations already dependent on voluntary labour, such constraints threaten their ability to function and risk undermining the very objectives localization seeks to advance.

Overall, the experiences documented through this study reaffirm the continued relevance of diaspora organizations across the HDPN, while highlighting the structural conditions needed to sustain their engagement. Targeted capacity-building, flexible accompaniment and more inclusive conducive environments emerge as critical for supporting diaspora contributions to the nexus. As funding landscapes evolve, reinforcing these mechanisms will be essential to ensure that diaspora actors can continue to play a meaningful role in both their countries of residence and origin.

EDITORIAL INFORMATION

Journal Editors

- Pablo Rojas Coppari (IOM)
- Jenna Nassiri (York University)
- Micaela Lincango (IOM)

Production

- Valerie Hagger (IOM)
- Melissa Borlaza (IOM)
- Carmelo Torres (IOM)

Editorial Committee

- Pablo Cernadas (National University of Lanús)
- Bumi Camara (African Development Bank Group)
- Ako Muto (Rikkyo University)
- Tuba Bircan (Virje Universiteit Brussel)
- Michele LeVoy (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants)
- Faisal Garba (University of Cape Town)
- Pia Oberoi (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights)
- Gibril Faal (GK Partners)
- Tamara Wood (La Trobe University)
- Ilan Cohn (HIAS Europe)
- Irem Arf (International Trade Union Confederations)

Reviewers

- Céline Bauloz (Independent researcher)
- Fabio Jiménez (IOM)
- Anny Yip-Ching Yu (IOM)
- Elisa Mosler Vidal (IOM)
- Silvia Gagliardi (University College Dublin)

PUB2026/006/EL

IOM Publications Platform

IOMPublications @IOMPublications

Sign up for **IOM Research** and **IOM Publications**

The *Migration Policy Practice* editors welcome submissions from practitioners, policy officials and applied researchers worldwide. Articles should:

- Not exceed 2,500 words and be written in a non-academic and reader-friendly style (with a maximum of 10 footnote references).
- Wherever possible, include statistical information analysis in graphs, tables and/or infographics.
- Provide analysis, findings and responses that can be applied/adapted by relevant public administrations or civil society in other countries.
- Articles on evaluations of specific migration policies and responses, including both findings and innovative methodologies, are particularly welcome.

Suggested citation: International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2026. *Migration Policy Practice, Vol. XV(1)*. IOM, Geneva.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IOM or any of its Member States. Any errors or oversights in this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors.

ISSN 2223-5248 | © IOM 2026

This work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivs 3.0 IGO License (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 IGO).*

For further specifications, please see the Copyright and Terms of Use.

This publication should not be used, published or redistributed for purposes primarily intended for or directed towards commercial advantage or monetary compensation, with the exception of educational purposes, e.g. to be included in textbooks.

Permissions: Requests for commercial use or further rights and licensing should be submitted to publications@iom.int.

* https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/igo/legalcode

IOM UN MIGRATION

