

**GRASSROOTS FORUM ON MIGRATION
GOVERNANCE (GFMG): GROUND-UP
MOVEMENT BUILDING**

GFMG DIALOGUE: CRITICAL INSIGHTS TOWARD TRANSFORMING THE MIGRATION CULTURE OF DIVISION

"We live in a time when acts of solidarity and alliance building at the grassroots may be our best option to transform the culture of division"



WHAT IS GFMG?

The Grassroots Forum on Migration Governance (GFMG) is a grassroots-led initiative that provides a dedicated space for dialogue on critical issues affecting migrants, their families, CSOs, and other labour movements. It seeks to offer a deeper and more accurate reflection of the diversity and complexity of concerns that grassroots migrant movements address in their daily lives across different regions and around the world.

The first GFMG was held during the Global Forum on Migration and Development from 22–26 January 2024 in Geneva, Switzerland. Even prior to this series, several processes had been convened, all with the same purpose and spirit of engagement.

Since May 2025, the GFMG has served as a preparatory space for the International Migration Review Forum 2026, anchoring advocacy within a rights-based framework. Through the GFMG, CSOs have been able to strengthen and coordinate their advocacy positions ahead of key international forums, ensuring that migration governance remains people-centered and grounded in human rights. While the GFMG is a powerful response to the challenges faced by CSOs, it was also deeply rooted in the CSO's long-standing engagement with the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). This history traces back to the early struggles to bring migration onto the global agenda, beginning with the 2006 High-Level Dialogue, and continuing through the unprecedented solidarity and organizing efforts that led to the GCM's eventual adoption in 2018.

During this period, the GFMG has organized a series of eleven (11) webinars held from May 2025 to April 2026.

ORGANIZERS



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COLLECTIVE ADVOCACY IN TURBULENT TIMES:

Reclaiming Momentum and Rebuilding Solidarity

The kickoff session of the Grassroots Forum on Migration Governance (GFMG) webinar series started with a clear and shared political assessment: These are turbulent times.

Migration has become one of the most weaponised political issues globally, with elections won and lost on anti-migrant rhetoric, xenophobia increasingly normalised in parliamentary discourse, civic space steadily shrinking, funding for migration governance and humanitarian programmes cut, and the multilateral system facing financial contraction and institutional uncertainty.

At the same time, migrants are facing escalating precarity – through mass deportations, restrictive visa regimes, criminalisation, labour exploitation, and climate-driven displacement. All these lived experiences are equally traumatic for all migrants and, consequently, remain as key priorities of the migration agenda.

The GFMG webinar series was launched not merely as preparation for the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF), but as a response to this political moment amidst turbulent times. The sessions' participants collectively posed this question with urgency: What do we, as communities of rights defenders and activists, do now?

The first in the series of GFMG webinars revealed three core realities:

1. Civil society organisations (CSOs) historically shaped migration governance, but only through organised struggle.
2. Momentum around the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) has weakened, and must be rebuilt deliberately.
3. This opportune moment, here and now, demands collective, visible, and intersectional advocacy, not fragmented engagement

CSOs HAVE ALWAYS HAD TO FIGHT FOR THEIR SPACE

The historical overview presented during the first GFMG series started from the 2006 High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development to the 2018 adoption of the Global Compact for Migration, which did not occur because states generously opened the door.

CSOs organised themselves, demanded regional consultations, negotiated speaking space during GCM negotiations, produced unified advocacy documents, and insisted on human rights language precisely during moments when the very mention of “human rights” was considered politically risky.

History matters and this milestone is worth highlighting because it challenges any illusion that multilateral space has been permanently secured. CSOs had to mobilise strategically to access and influence these spaces and processes. CSOs' participation was neither gifted nor guaranteed; it was space that had to be claimed and defended time and again.

MOMENTUM LOST

The adoption of the Global Compact for Migration in 2018 was historic. For the first time, states endorsed a comprehensive framework grounded in rights-based migration governance. The language was not perfect, but CSOs pushed for stronger commitments on regularisation, decriminalisation, ending child detention, and expanding pathways. Admittedly, not all demands were met, and yet momentum was evident, which, unfortunately, has now stalled.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted early implementation; the 2022 IMRF took place under constrained conditions; political backlash intensified; anti-migrant rhetoric gained legitimacy; funding contracted; and civic space narrowed or closed for both CSOs and migrants across regions. Meanwhile, governments continue to report on GCM progress, often in procedural language largely disconnected from lived reality. In some contexts, commitments under the GCM coexist with policies that actually undermine migrants' rights in practice.

THE MULTILATERAL SYSTEM UNDER STRAIN

The United Nations (UN) system itself is entering a period of contraction. Budget reductions, institutional restructuring, and competing global crises are threatening migration governance efforts. Migration governance relies on international cooperation, but as multilateral trust erodes, responsibility-sharing collapses. In that vacuum, unilateral border policies expand. The GCM, originally built on principles of shared responsibility, solidarity, and rights, is now under increasing political stress. In this environment, CSOs can no longer assume institutional continuity, and advocacy must be equally informed by insecurity as well as prepared for instability.

REGIONAL REALITIES DEMAND GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

Voices from Africa, the Pacific, and the Middle East revealed a common thread on repression, exploitation, and political manipulation of migration, and all are intensifying. In parts of Africa, migration is instrumentalised for electoral gain, while in the Middle East, civic space is restricted and migrant workers face systemic abuse. In the Pacific, climate mobility presents existential threats to entire island communities, and across regions, funding cuts are undermining frontline support services.

Recruitment exploitation in Africa connects to labour demand in Gulf states; climate displacement in the Pacific intersects with global emissions responsibility; and deportation regimes in major countries of destination (CODs) reshape global mobility patterns.

Fragmented advocacy cannot match interconnected injustice. Solidarity must move beyond statements; it must translate into coordinated campaigns, shared messaging, and synchronised political pressure.

NON-NEGOTIABLE HUMAN RIGHTS

One statement echoed repeatedly in the session: **Human rights are non-negotiable.** This is not idealism, but baseline principled governance. When governments frame migration primarily as a security issue and a human issue secondarily, rights become conditional, and conditional rights are unstable rights. In times of crises, states often claim exceptional authority, but CSOs' role is to remind them that crisis does not suspend dignity. Rights frameworks were specifically designed for turbulent moments. If CSOs dilute the human rights language to remain "acceptable," they risk legitimising regression.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The path forward requires deliberate realignment of momentum, narrative, and strategy

1. CSOs must rebuild a unified advocacy front ahead of the upcoming IMRF and GFMD processes. This requires early coordination, shared messaging, and collective agenda-setting rather than parallel statements. The historic “Ten Acts” [1] model referenced in the session offers a precedent: clear, prioritised demands developed collaboratively and presented with one voice.
2. The movement must expand beyond policy rooms. Multilateral engagement remains essential, but public narrative work is equally urgent. Anti-migrant actors have mastered emotional messaging. Therefore, CSOs must counter with visible, accessible, values-driven campaigns that reaffirm dignity, contribution, and shared humanity in language that captures emotions and imagination.
3. Capacity-building must focus on emerging leadership. The intergenerational dynamic highlighted in the kickoff session is strategic. Sustained advocacy requires nurturing new voices, especially migrant-led organisations, youth networks, and grassroots actors.
4. CSOs must institutionalise rapid-response mechanisms. When governments enact mass deportations, restrict asylum, or criminalise migrants, response cannot be delayed. A coordinated alert-and-mobilise framework linking organisations across regions can transform isolated outrage into global visibility.
5. The movement must defend civic space. Shrinking participation at UN and national levels is not procedural inconvenience, rather a democratic erosion. Without space to organise, no rights agenda can survive and be delivered.
6. Climate mobility and immobility (the right to stay) must be recognised as an Indigenous Right, a human rights and climate justice issue. For climate-impacted communities, mobility is not merely movement between places, but movement within relationships to ancestral lands, oceans, cultures, languages and identities. Climate impacts are increasingly forcing difficult choices between mobility, immobility, planned relocation, resettlement and repatriation.
7. Solidarity must be intersectional. Migration intersects with climate justice, labour rights, gender equality, and democratic governance. Building alliances across movements expands reach and deepens legitimacy. **Migration cannot be defended in isolation.**

BEYOND LABELS:

Mixed Migration in Focus & Complementarity between GCM and GCR

The distinction between “refugee” and “migrant” was designed to provide clarity in international protection regimes. In practice, it has generated fragmentation, competition, and policy blind spots. The contemporary reality of movement particularly in regions such as Southeast Asia does not conform neatly to legal categories. People move together, through the same routes, using the same networks, for overlapping reasons. Yet the global governance architecture continues to separate them into rigid frameworks.

The debate over “mixed migration” exposes a deeper tension within migration governance. Refugee advocates often perceive mixed flows as a threat to the integrity of asylum systems. Migrant rights advocates, by contrast, do not necessarily view mixed movement as a conceptual crisis. The result is an uneven politics of protection, where institutional preservation sometimes overrides human-centered solutions.

The refugee–migrant divide, further complicated by vague references to “displaced persons”, both internally displaced and across–borders, has become both administratively convenient and politically dangerous. While asylum systems must be preserved, the current fragmentation of advocacy and policy undermines protection for all people on the move. The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) operate in parallel, yet insufficiently intersecting spheres. Without deliberate coordination and structural reform, this division will continue to weaken rights-based approaches.

MIXED MIGRATION IS NOT AN ANOMALY, BUT A NORM

In Southeast Asia and many other regions, movement rarely occurs in clean categories. A single boat may carry refugees fleeing persecution, migrant workers escaping economic collapse, trafficked persons, and individuals who cannot clearly articulate their reasons for departure. They share routes, risks, smugglers, detention centers, and labour exploitation.

From an operational standpoint, this creates administrative challenges. Refugee status determination becomes more complex. Identification of trafficked persons becomes more difficult. States may respond by tightening borders and increasing skepticism toward asylum claims.

However, the framing of mixed migration as a “problem” reveals more about institutional discomfort than about human mobility. For migration scholars and migrant rights advocates, this fluidity is expected, as people’s motivations are layered, with economic collapse often inseparable from political repression and environmental degradation interacting with discrimination, meaning survival rarely fits into a single legal definition.

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee narrowly: a person with a well-founded fear of persecution based on specific grounds. This definition is legally powerful and politically fragile. Refugee advocates rightly fear that conflating refugees with irregular migrants may weaken asylum systems, reduce state commitments, and erode integration pathways.

With little progress being made on opening regular pathways for migration, and with transit and destination countries becoming increasingly restrictive, mixed migration numbers continue to rise. States and internationally mandated organisations must respond to this crisis with the political will to act efficiently, adequately, and in strict adherence to international human rights standards.

This response must move beyond the rigid categorisation of "migrant" versus "refugee." Regardless of the legal label or the specific drivers of their journey, all individuals on the move deserve dignity, protection, and recognition of their shared humanity. By focusing on needs and vulnerabilities rather than status, CSOs, trade unions and other stakeholders uphold the fundamental principle of "leaving no one behind".

GCR AND GCM SEPARATION REINFORCES FRAGMENTATION

The GCR and the GCM were negotiated through distinct processes, reflecting different political sensitivities. The GCR centers burden-sharing for refugees. The GCM addresses broader migration governance.

In theory, they are complementary. In practice, they often operate in silos. Delegations attending one process may not engage meaningfully with the other. Civil society actors are frequently either refugee-focused or migration-focused. This structural separation produces blind spots. Commitments in one compact may undermine or contradict discussions in the other. Without deliberate coordination, policies may prioritise border management over protection, or labour market efficiency over rights.

Addressing the fragmentation between refugee and migrant protection requires structural, legal, and political recalibration. The objective is not to erase distinctions, but to prevent those distinctions from weakening protection. The following recommendations aim to correct systemic gaps while preserving the integrity of asylum and strengthening migrant protections.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The GCR and the GCM must no longer operate as parallel conversations. Their separation has produced policy inconsistencies and advocacy silos. Governments and CSOs should institutionalise coordination mechanisms that require structured cross-referencing of commitments.

These should include:

1. Joint national implementation reviews that assess how migration policies affect asylum systems and vice versa
2. Cross-participation of delegations in both GCR and GCM review forums
3. Harmonised reporting templates that require states to identify spillover impacts between the two frameworks

4. States must build complementary protection systems that prevent misuse of asylum while strengthening rights protection overall, which, in turn, requires:

- Humanitarian visas for individuals facing serious harm unrelated to Convention persecution grounds.
- Labour dispute resolution mechanisms accessible to migrants regardless of status
- Regularisation pathways for long-term undocumented populations
- Stronger enforcement against recruitment abuse and employer retaliation

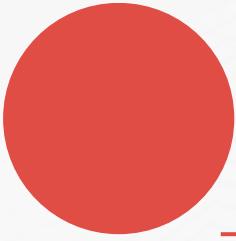
5. Governments and CSOs should adopt a consistent rights-based framing that affirms:

- All persons on the move are rights holders under international human rights law.
- Legal status determines entitlements, but not inherent dignity
- Protection of migrants strengthens, rather than weakens, asylum systems.

6. Strengthen accountability across migration governance. Mechanisms should include:

- Independent CSOs' shadow-reporting linked to official reviews
- Public benchmarks on detention practices, labour protections, and non-refoulement compliance
- Transparent data disaggregation to track treatment of different categories of movers

7. Mixed migration frameworks must acknowledge that climate change impacts frequently intersect with economic vulnerability, environmental degradation, cultural loss, labour mobility and disaster displacement. Climate-affected communities and villages may not meet refugee definitions; however, they must be prioritised for social/economic protections, pathways and rights-based solutions.



MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT:

Structural Contradictions, Political Evasion, and the Urgent Need for Rights-Based Reform

Global debates on migration and development continue to operate within a deep structural contradiction. On one hand, migrants are praised as economic growth drivers, remittance providers, and sustainable development contributors. On the other hand, the rights of migrants remain marginalised, instrumentalised, and frequently ignored in global policy frameworks. Development is celebrated in economic terms, yet the human beings who fuel it are systematically excluded from its consequent protections and benefits.

The current global architecture, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Financing for Development (FfD) processes, and high-level political forums, reflects this contradiction. Migration is referenced rhetorically but excluded substantively. Economic growth is prioritised over human development. Private sector investment is elevated, while structural inequality and labour exploitation are left unaddressed.

The dominant migration–development discourse is structurally flawed because it prioritises economic growth over human rights, instrumentalises migrants as financial assets, and increasingly shifts responsibility for development onto private actors without accountability.

DEVELOPMENT REDUCED TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

Development in global policy has been narrowed to the expansion of gross domestic products (GDPs) and financial flows, a reduction that is not accidental, but rather reflects a political choice. Instead of centering human development in education, health, dignity, and equitable income distribution, the dominant model prioritises economic output.

GDP growth does not measure distribution, fairness, or whether workers receive just wages or migrant labour is exploited. A country may rank high in GDP while maintaining extreme inequality and systemic labour abuses. Even within the SDGs, migration was largely absent until geopolitical crises forced its acknowledgment. When migration is mentioned, it is often confined to remittance costs, financial inclusion, and investment mobilisation, while the core issues, such as the rights and well-being of migrants, are sidelined.

The failure to move beyond GDP means that development is evaluated without examining who benefits, and economic expansion without equitable redistribution reinforces structural inequality.

MIGRANTS INSTRUMENTALISED AS FINANCIAL TOOLS

FfD discussions focused heavily on how to mobilise private capital, including diaspora investment. Governments discussed incentivising remittance use for development projects. What was absent was a serious examination of whether migrant workers are paid living wages, whether they face wage theft, whether they are covered by social protection, or whether they freely and safely exercise political rights in both countries of origin or destination.

This instrumentalisation transforms migrants into revenue streams. Remittances become macroeconomic stabilisers, but the structural conditions that force migration such as debt, inequality, colonial legacies, and labour market exploitation remain largely unaddressed.

Furthermore, migrant workers are often concentrated in sectors characterised by vulnerability such as agriculture, construction, hospitality, care work, and many others. Migrants work under exploitative conditions, including wage theft, informal contracts, restricted mobility, and limited access to social protections. Yet, global development discussions rarely confront these realities directly.

RISE OF PRIVATE SECTOR DOMINANCE WITHOUT ACCOUNTABILITY

Global increasingly relies on private sector mobilisation. Public–private partnerships are promoted as efficient solutions. Corporations are invited to finance social goods traditionally provided by states.

This shift raises critical concerns, including:

1. Private actors are profit-driven.
2. Their time horizon is short-term.
3. Their incentives do not automatically align with human rights or social equity.

Without binding accountability mechanisms, voluntary corporate social responsibility measures are insufficient. Development financing cannot be left to entities whose primary obligation is shareholder-return.

The problem is not merely corporate participation, but rather the absence of enforceable standards. If development becomes profit-oriented, social goods become commodified. When private actors fund healthcare, education, or infrastructure, the logic of profit may override equitable access. The right to development is fundamentally a state obligation. When states rely excessively on private financing, they weaken democratic accountability and public oversight.

MIGRATION OMITTED IN KEY DEVELOPMENT REVIEWS

At the High-Level Political Forum reviewing SDG progress, migration was largely invisible. Despite clear connections between migration and goals related to health, gender equality, decent work, and partnerships, governments rarely integrated migration into national development reporting.

CSOs participation in development forums have also faced constraints, including limited space for dissenting political expression. If critical voices are silenced while private actors gain influence, policy outcomes will reflect power asymmetries rather than reforms bending towards justice.

STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY AND COLONIAL LEGACIES REMAIN UNADDRESSED

Migration cannot be separated from global inequality. Many labour migration patterns reflect historical exploitation, unequal trade structures, and debt burdens imposed on Global South countries.

Debt architecture reform remains weak. Countries facing heavy debt burdens continue to service obligations that limit their domestic development capacity, increasing reliance on remittances and labour export strategies.

As a result, migration functions as a survival strategy not only for the state—seeking foreign exchange to meet external debt obligations but also for households that depend on overseas income to secure basic needs. When countries depend on exporting labour to stabilise foreign exchange reserves, migration becomes less a matter of free choice for individual workers and more a constrained response to limited opportunities at home. This reality contradicts narratives of voluntary mobility and financial empowerment, which frame migration as an expression of individual agency rather than a necessity shaped by structural pressures.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Development must be evaluated using human development measures, not GDP alone.
 - Prioritise education, health, and equitable income redistribution.
 - Use per capita income and inequality-adjusted measures.
 - Integrate migrant well-being indicators into SDG monitoring.
 - Disaggregate data by migration status.
2. Embed binding rights protections in Migration–Development Frameworks.
 - Criminalise and prosecute wage theft.
 - Guarantee equal labour rights regardless of migration status.
 - Ensure access to social protection systems.
 - Regulate recruitment practices to eliminate debt bondage and coercion.
 - Monitor labour conditions through independent inspections.
3. Private sector engagement must be subject to strict accountability mechanisms.
 - Tie corporate tax incentives to compliance with labour rights standards.
 - Mandate transparency in supply chains employing migrant labour.
 - Link executive compensation to measurable labour rights compliance.
 - Establish binding frameworks under international business and human rights standards.
4. Reform global debt architecture
 - Establish transparent and fair sovereign debt restructuring mechanisms.
 - Reduce interest burdens for heavily indebted countries.
 - Prevent exploitative lending practices.
 - Ensure that debt relief translates into investments in social protection and labour standards.
6. Migrant communities must shape migration governance.
 - Formalised participation of migrant-led organisations in international forums
 - Funding mechanisms that do not depend solely on private corporate sources
 - Inclusion of migrant voices in SDG national reviews and global compact assessments
7. Confront xenophobia and political manipulation
 - Adopt anti-discrimination enforcement mechanisms
 - Invest in public education campaigns grounded in evidence
 - Reject policies that treat migrants as disposable labour

The dominant development paradigm prioritises growth over dignity, profit over equity, and private capital over public accountability. Without a decisive shift toward human development, enforceable rights, and structural reform, migration will remain a symptom of injustice rather than a choice grounded in opportunity.

8. Development financing must address the structural drivers of climate mobility and immobility; and affected communities should not be forced to migrate because adaptation finance failed to reach them. Climate finance, loss and damage funding and social protection systems should support the right to remain, the right to move and the right to relocate with dignity.

Further, we emphasise:

- Direct access to climate finance must be guaranteed for communities facing displacement risks;
- That climate mobility and immobility indicators must be integrated into SDG monitoring; and
- That funding should resource community-led adaptation to reduce forced displacement

STORYTELLING AS POWER:

Reclaiming Migration Narratives in an Age of Fear and Disinformation

Migration policy is not shaped by data alone; it is shaped by narrative, emotion, and repetition. Across regions, anti-migrant forces have mastered storytelling, using isolated incidents to construct sweeping generalisations, weaponising fear, and simplifying complex migration dynamics into slogans. They repeat their message relentlessly until it becomes political common sense. Meanwhile, those working for migrant rights often rely on reports, policy briefs, and technical language. While facts matter, they do not move people on their own; stories do.

The battle over migration is fundamentally a battle over meaning. Without intentional, strategic narrative building, anti-migrant forces will continue to dominate public imagination. To counter this, storytelling and narrative building must be reclaimed as a tool of dignity, disruption, memory, and political transformation.

ANTI-MIGRANT MOVEMENTS OUTPACING MIGRANT RIGHTS ACTIVISTS IN NARRATIVE BUILDING STRATEGY

Right-wing and anti-migrant movements understand the emotive mechanics of storytelling. They do not wait for evidence; they lead with imagery, simplify blame, and personalise fear. One crime becomes the symbol of an entire community; one border crossing becomes an invasion; and one economic downturn becomes the fault of newcomers. These narratives are effective because they are emotive, repetitive, and accessible.

They frame migrants as threats to safety, culture, and economic stability, and once that frame is established, policy restrictions follow. Constantly countering false claims keeps advocates trapped in someone else's storyline. When the strategy is only reactive, the frame remains controlled by those spreading fear. If we are always responding, we are not leading.

DATA WITHOUT STORY FAILS TO SHIFT HEARTS

Migration advocates often default to statistics such as contribution to GDP, demographic trends, labour shortages, and remittance flows. In reality, human beings are moved by stories, not spreadsheets.

A single lived experience, told with clarity and dignity, can travel further than a technical report. This does not mean abandoning evidence; it means integrating or complementing it. Data strengthens and grounds stories, while stories contextualise and humanise data. The most powerful narrative work weaves lived experience and felt truth rooted in facts.

CENTERING LIVED EXPERIENCE

The recurring theme from the GFMG discussions was clear: **Migrants must tell their own stories.** Too often, stories are extracted, edited, and repackaged by institutions. When migrants are reduced to case studies or victims, their agency is erased, and storytelling becomes transactional.

Authentic storytelling requires safe spaces, consent, trauma awareness, and long-term support. Sharing stories can reopen wounds, so storytelling must not exploit pain for visibility; it must prioritise dignity and well-being.

When migrants speak for themselves, the narrative shifts from victimhood to leadership. Migrants are not passive recipients of charity; they are workers, organisers, artists, parents, innovators, political actors, and rights advocates.

MEMORY IS RESISTANCE

Colonial histories, displacement, labour exploitation, and climate injustice are often erased from mainstream narratives. Migration is framed as disruption, rather than as part of a long continuum of movement shaped by power structures.

Reclaiming the narrative means restoring historical memory, reminding audiences that many modern states were built by migrants, shaped by migration, and expanded through forced displacement and labour extraction.

Art, storytelling, and narrative building disrupt amnesia, forcing recognition and challenging sanitised versions of history. In this sense, narrative building transcends storytelling as it becomes political resistance.

NARRATIVE STRATEGY REQUIRES INTENTIONAL DESIGN

Effective narrative work requires clarity of:

- What it is not – focusing on dismantling myths or appropriated stories and realities
- What it is for – targeting values, principles, policies, and practices to establish or reinforce
- Who it is done with and for – acknowledging that though stories and realities may be lived by particular persons or communities, the narratives are told in collaboration, amplified for specific audiences, and optimised for reach within identified platforms
- What the intentions are – clarifying both purpose and aspirational goal in the narrative building enterprise, ideally with calibrated milestones to celebrate incremental victories

There are moments for rapid-response storytelling when injustice is unfolding and public attention is high. There are also long-term narrative investments such as films, books, and sustained campaigns that shape culture over time.

Without rapid response, misinformation spreads unchecked, and without long-term narrative building, public imagination remains stagnant.

HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS DEMAND CREATIVE TACTICS

In some contexts, public demonstration is dangerous, as anti-migrant violence, police repression, and political hostility limit visible protest. This does not eliminate storytelling; it changes its form. Silent protest, symbolic imagery, digital storytelling, music, poetry, faith-based gatherings, community exhibitions, private sector champions, diaspora networks, and social media campaigns all become vital alternatives.

Storytelling adapts to context, and when physical space is constrained, narrative travels through alternative and innovative channels and platforms.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Develop a coordinated narrative building strategy ahead of major forums (ex. 2026 IMRF)
 - Identify core messages grounded in dignity and shared humanity.
 - Align storytelling campaigns with policy demands.
 - Coordinate across regions to avoid fragmentation.
 - Invest in pre-forum narrative building rather than relying solely on statements within the forum.
 - Policy spaces reflect public sentiment. Narrative work must begin before negotiations start.
2. Donors and other international institutions should invest in migrant-led storytelling infrastructure.
 - Fund storytelling as core work, not as an add-on project.
 - Provide training in public speaking, digital storytelling, and media engagement.
 - Support translation and accessibility.
 - Prioritise trauma-informed approaches.
3. Shift from reactive to proactive narrative framing.
 - Define migrants as contributors, caregivers, innovators, and community builders.
 - Highlight cross-cultural solidarity.
 - Avoid reinforcing harmful frames even when disputing them.
4. Integrate data and lived experiences strategically.
 - Clarify and contextualise evidence.
 - Link to policy solutions.
 - Identify calls to action.
5. Protect well-being and consent.
 - Establish clear consent protocols.
 - Avoid pressuring individuals to share trauma publicly.
 - Offer follow-up support.
 - Ensure storytellers have agency over how their narratives are used, told, and shared.
6. Expand the scope of storytelling. Include the following, among others:
 - Film and literature
 - Dance and music
 - Photography and performance art
 - Social media campaigns
 - Community rituals
 - Intergenerational oral histories
7. Indigenous narratives are critical forms of evidence. Indigenous and Pacific peoples have long histories of mobility, voyaging, stewardship and adaptation. Climate mobility narratives should be told by affected communities themselves, rather than being reduced to stories of affected communities as victims or inevitable displacement.

The future of migration governance will not be determined solely by negotiation rooms. It will be shaped by the stories that define who belongs, who contributes, and who is seen as fully human.

CLIMATE MOBILITY, INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT, AND REFUGEE PROTECTION:

A System Unprepared for Predictable Crisis

Climate mobility is no longer a future scenario, but a current, accelerating reality. Rising sea levels, prolonged droughts, desertification, floods, and extreme weather events continue to displace millions of people annually. Yet, global governance systems remain structurally unprepared to respond.

Cross-border displacement remains legally ambiguous, as refugee protection frameworks were not designed for environmental collapse. While states acknowledge the risks in diplomatic forums, the response remains fragmented, reactive, and politically cautious. The fundamental problem is not a lack of awareness, but more a lack of structural adaptation. **Climate mobility exposes the weakness of current migration and refugee systems, revealing legal gaps, political avoidance, funding shortages, and an unwillingness to confront responsibility.**

Climate mobility governance is failing because:

1. Legal frameworks do not reflect environmental displacement realities.
2. Internal displacement systems are chronically under-resourced.
3. Cross-border climate displacement lacks formal protection pathways.
4. Adaptation financing does not meaningfully integrate mobility planning.
5. High-emitting states avoid proportional responsibility and accountability.

Without structural reform, climate mobility will generate humanitarian crises that existing systems simply cannot absorb.

LEGAL FRAMEWORKS DO NOT RECOGNISE CLIMATE DISPLACEMENT

The international refugee protection regime was constructed around persecution. It does not explicitly recognise environmental degradation, slow-onset climate collapse, or ecosystem failure as grounds for refugee status.

People fleeing climate-related disasters often fall into categories of “irregular migrants,” displaced, rather than protected persons. States treat them as immigration cases rather than protection cases.

When land becomes uninhabitable due to salinisation, when drought eliminates agricultural livelihoods for years, or when coastal erosion permanently submerges territories, displacement is not voluntary migration. It is a forced movement that most people refuse to recognise.

OVERWHELMED INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT SYSTEMS

The majority of climate-related displacement occurs internally, with communities relocating within national borders following disasters or gradual environmental decline. These internally displaced persons remain under the jurisdiction of their own governments, -

which, in theory, means they are protected. However, in practice, many governments lack the capability, funding, or political will to provide substantial solutions. Temporary shelters often become semi-permanent settlements, reconstruction funding remains insufficient, and land tenure disputes delay formal resettlement. Vulnerable populations such as women, children, and the elderly face heightened risks of exploitation and compounded insecurity.

Internal displacement is often treated as a short-term emergency, yet climate mobility is neither fleeting nor short-term. Slow-onset degradation creates protracted displacement patterns that national systems are not designed to manage. When displacement becomes cyclical, with repeated evacuations due to recurring disasters, humanitarian response mechanisms are stretched beyond their design limits.

POLITICALLY AVOIDED CROSS-BORDER CLIMATE DISPLACEMENT

Cross-border movement linked to climate stress is increasing, yet states resist formal recognition of climate refugees. The political fear is clear: Recognition may create perceived obligations to admit displaced populations.

People displaced by environmental collapse may seek asylum under existing refugee laws, but success depends on narrow interpretations, as courts differ in their rulings, hence, the inconsistency in outcomes. Humanitarian visas and temporary protection schemes exist in some jurisdictions, but they are ad hoc and discretionary in nature.

CLIMATE ADAPTATION FINANCING IGNORES MOBILITY PLANNING

Climate finance discussions frequently focus on mitigation and infrastructure adaptation, yet, mobility is rarely integrated into national adaptation plans in a systematic way. Mobility is, in fact, a form of adaptation – such as planned relocation, labour mobility agreements, or movement protocols – and urban resettlement planning can all reduce long-term harm.

However, adaptation funding rarely prioritises preemptive relocation planning, social housing development in receiving areas, legal assistance for land rights, or economic integration programmes for displaced communities. Instead, funds are often reactive, deployed after disasters, rather than in anticipation of displacement before it becomes inevitable.

UNEVEN AND AVOIDED RESPONSIBILITY

Climate crisis is driven disproportionately by high-emitting economies, yet displacement impacts are often concentrated in lower-income countries with limited adaptive capacities. This imbalance raises an unavoidable question of responsibility. If environmental degradation forces displacement, and that degradation is linked to historical emissions, then protection and financing obligations cannot and should not be evenly distributed.

Current funding commitments fall short of projected needs, while loss and damage mechanisms remain politically contested, and financial pledges do not consistently translate into accessible resources. Climate mobility cannot be separated from climate justice, as any governance model that ignores responsibility essentially reproduces inequality. While displacement data has improved, predictive modeling is not fully integrated into policymaking yet.

Governments know that certain regions will become less habitable, with sea-level projections, drought forecasts, and temperature modeling well established. However, migration policy rarely reflects forward-looking planning.

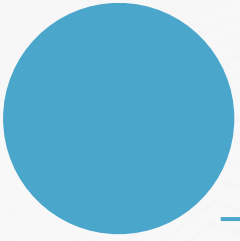
RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Establish formal protection pathways for cross-border climate displacement. States must create consistently reliable legal mechanisms for individuals displaced by environmental factors, including:
 - Humanitarian visas specific to climate-related displacement
 - Regional protection agreements for climate-affected populations
 - Expanded interpretation of complementary protection standards
 - Temporary protection mechanisms with pathways to permanence where return is not viable
2. Integrate mobility into national adaptation plans.
 - Identify high-risk zones using climate projections.
 - Develop planned relocation strategies before displacement becomes chaotic.
 - Invest in infrastructure and housing in receiving communities.
 - Include displaced communities in both planning forums and decision-making platforms.
3. Strengthen protection and support for internally displaced persons (IDPs).
 - Secure land tenure for relocated communities.
 - Provide long-term livelihood programmes.
 - Ensure access to healthcare, education, social services, and justice.
 - Protect displaced persons from exploitation and discrimination.
4. Climate financing mechanisms should allocate specific funding streams for:
 - Mobility planning
 - Community relocation
 - Urban integration programs
 - Cross-border protection coordination
5. High-emitting countries should:
 - Contribute proportionally to climate mobility response funds.
 - Support regional resettlement schemes.
 - Facilitate labour mobility pathways for affected populations.
 - Strengthen loss and damage financing mechanisms.

The current global framework was not designed for environmental displacement at this scale. Without structural reform, governance systems will continue to respond reactively, inconsistently, and inadequately.

Climate mobility challenges the foundations of migration and refugee law, funding systems, and political narratives, as it is predictable, and the failure to prepare and to effectively respond are not reflections of an accident, but manifestations of a political decision.

6. Climate mobility, immobility, displacement and planned relocation should be recognised as interconnected human rights, climate justice and sustainable development issues. While significant attention is often given to displacement, equal recognition must be afforded to climate immobility, where individuals, families and communities are unable to move despite escalating risks due to poverty, disability, age, gender inequalities, cultural responsibilities, lack of resources or limited access to safe and regular mobility pathways. Policies and programmes must therefore uphold the rights of all affected populations, including those who choose to remain, those who are unable to move, and those who seek mobility as an adaptation strategy.
7. Indigenous Peoples must be recognised as rights-holders, knowledge-holders and decision-makers in all climate mobility responses. Climate impacts threaten customary lands, waters and oceans, sacred sites, cultural heritage, traditional livelihoods and governance systems that have sustained Indigenous communities for generations. Any measures relating to displacement, relocation or mobility must uphold Indigenous Peoples' rights, including Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), self-determination, customary tenure and meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Indigenous knowledge systems and traditional governance arrangements should inform all climate mobility policies and actions.
8. Where planned relocation becomes necessary, it must be pursued only as a measure of last resort through community-led, rights-based and culturally appropriate approaches. Relocation processes should be guided by informed community consent, long-term planning, adequate financing and sustained support for affected populations. Particular attention should be given to livelihood restoration, social cohesion, access to essential services and the preservation of cultural identity, ensuring that relocated communities can maintain their dignity, agency and connections to their heritage across generations.
9. Climate mobility responses must also address non-economic loss and damage, which is often overlooked despite its profound impacts on communities. This includes the loss of languages, cultural practices, traditional knowledge, spiritual connections, identity, sense of place and ancestral relationships with lands and oceans. Such losses cannot be measured solely through economic indicators and require dedicated recognition, protection and resourcing. Policies should safeguard cultural continuity and support the transmission of Indigenous knowledge, languages and traditions to future generations.
10. Particular attention should be given to the ocean and intergenerational dimensions of climate mobility. Sea-level rise, saltwater intrusion, coastal erosion, ecosystem degradation, fisheries decline and threats to maritime rights are already affecting the livelihoods, food security and cultural survival of many coastal and island communities. Climate mobility strategies should strengthen resilience while supporting safe mobility pathways, including cross-border options where in-country adaptation is no longer viable. Women, children, youth, elders and persons with disabilities must be prioritised, with youth recognised not only as beneficiaries but as leaders and partners in shaping climate-resilient futures for present and future generations.



RETURN, READMISSION, DEPORTATION, AND REINTEGRATION

Contemporary debates on return, readmission, and reintegration are often presented as technical or administrative questions of migration management. However, these debates cannot be understood without situating them within a longer historical context of mobility, power, and entitlement.

For centuries, colonial powers exercised unrestricted mobility across vast territories in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Pacific. British, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, and other colonial regimes did not migrate temporarily; they settled, ruled, extracted resources, imposed political systems, and reshaped societies for generations, and they continue to do so in many ways. Their presence was normalised, legitimised, and protected by force. There was no expectation of “return” once extraction was complete.

In contrast, today’s migrants, many of whom move within global systems shaped directly by colonial legacies, are denied the right to stay. Their mobility is framed as a problem, their presence as conditional, and their futures as temporary. This raises fundamental questions on double standards: Why was long-term settlement acceptable for colonisers, but not for those educated in, socialised into, and economically sustaining post-colonial societies?

The return discourse reflects enduring hierarchies of power. Mobility remains a privilege for the powerful, while it is criminalised, and securitised for those perceived as inferior or expendable. Mobility rights are shaped by racism, discrimination, and conditioned upon migrants’ ability to offer labour and resources to those higher up in the status quo. **The expectation that migrants must eventually return is not neutral; it is an expression of control rooted in historical entitlement.**

At the heart of this debate lies an unresolved question: Is there a right to stay? International frameworks emphasise the right to leave and the right to return, but remain largely silent on the right to remain. This silence enables states to treat presence as temporary by default, even where migrants have built lives, families, and communities over decades. It also leaves States with the ability to revoke rights and alter policies as they see fit, closely associating these actions with market fluctuations and economic conditions. A case in point is what took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ultra-commodification of migrants as the first to return and the last to recover from the repercussions of the pandemic. Another is the recent political decisions of the United States of America (USA) to remove citizens, legal residents, and their children from its territory due to the current administration’s migration and ‘America First’ policies.



CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT: RETURN AS GOVERNANCE AND CONTROL

In current migration governance, return and readmission are increasingly normalised as pillars of “orderly” migration. States frame return as necessary for credibility, deterrence, and control. Yet, in practice, return functions as a mechanism for managing labour while avoiding long-term responsibility and fundamental rights.

Destination countries open their doors to migrants because their economies depend on them particularly in low-wage, labour-intensive, and care sectors. Without migrant labour, many economies would struggle to function. Despite this dependency, migrants are expected to remain temporary, disposable, and replaceable – to return at the drop of a hat.

This logic is especially evident in systems that emphasise short-term contracts producing temporary jobs, and circular migration. Migrants are encouraged to live alone, work intensively, remit earnings, and eventually return, often without pathways to permanence, family unity, social protection, or safety nets in their countries of origin – leaving us with one of the most reality-gripping questions to be answered: Does the cost of migration far outweigh the benefits?

On the other end of the spectrum, there is the undeniable connection between remittances and development in countries of origin. Questions from the GFMG webinar series participants included inquiries on whether countries of origin (COOs) were utilising their resources from remittances, development funds, and loans in an effective manner that creates sustainable pathways for migrants’ return and expands on opportunities for migrants’ families. Have COOs relied on remittances for too long to develop their own economies, markets, and infrastructures to create the jobs that migrants need, so that future generations have a balanced and realistic choice to make –whether to stay or follow in the footsteps of previous generations and migrate? Or have the COOs become too comfortable with their roles as “labour brokerage states”?

POWER, INEQUALITY, AND THE GENDERED NATURE OF RETURN

Return policies are not applied evenly. Migrants from wealthier regions enjoy higher incomes, greater freedom of movement, longer residence options, access to regularisation, and more comprehensive integration strategies overall, if not bilateral agreements to transfer their social protection benefits. In contrast, migrants from the Global South, particularly women migrant workers, are subjected to stricter controls, heightened surveillance, and enforced temporariness.

Low-wage and feminised sectors such as domestic work, care, and agriculture are especially affected. Women migrants are often valued only for their labour, exposed to violence and exploitation, and then required to leave once their health, age, or productivity declines. They are most often unable to vertically move up or across industries and must remain within low-wage sector jobs until their expected return, which is often tied to a temporary and short-term labour contract. Women migrant workers also suffer from “social death” by severing ties with their children and families throughout the entirety of their migration experiences.

This commodification is particularly stark in regions where migrants may spend their entire adult lives contributing to host societies, only to be expelled without pensions, benefit portability, or reintegration support. **Return in these cases is not a transition; it is abandonment.**

THE ECONOMIC FALLACY OF RETURN

The economic justification for return policies remains weak and under-examined. Destination states invest millions in detention, deportation, return hubs, and reintegration schemes, often with little evidence of long-term success. Reintegration programmes are frequently short-term, underfunded, poorly adapted to local realities, and are, most often, conditional upon the migrants' background (such as policies differentiating between European Union/European Economic Area (EU/EEA) citizens and "third country nationals"). Those can be reflected in language and knowledge tests for citizenship, and have again been shaped by colonial history. Other similar initiatives on conditional integration include "integration by qualification" programmes, progressively singling out migrants from specific sectors, backgrounds, and groups.

On the other hand, States spend a sizable amount of their budgets enforcing returns and deportations. These expenditures represent a significant waste of public resources. These funds could instead be invested in regularisation, integration, labour protections, and social service approaches shown to generate social and economic benefits for migrants and host communities alike.

The persistence of return policies despite their inefficiency highlights that return is not driven primarily by economic logic, but by political symbolism and control. Shifting policymaker mindsets from return to regularisation remains a central challenge, and practices of return and deportation to third countries are increasingly becoming the norm. The externalisation of borders has become a critical issue, as states increasingly shift migration control beyond their territories. In practice, migrants are often redirected to third countries where they have no prior ties, forcing difficult decisions such as leaving family members behind out of fear for their lives. These policies create precarious migration pathways, erode fundamental rights, and contribute to the dehumanisation of migrants, setting troubling precedents for other states.

BEYOND ECONOMICS: HUMAN RIGHTS, VALUES, AND VIOLENCE

While economic arguments are often used to justify migration policies, relying on them alone risks reinforcing the commodification of human beings. Migrants should not have to prove their worth solely through productivity or fiscal contribution.

Return policies often operate as forms of political violence, affecting women, children, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and entire communities. Forced or coerced returns expose individuals to family separation, loss of protection, trauma, and renewed insecurity. Violence is not only physical; it is structural, legal, and psychological.

Migration must be understood as a human experience with cultural, social, spiritual, and relational value, and not merely as a labour supply mechanism. Comments from the GFMG webinar participants included concerns and discussions on the crucial connection to the development factor by countries of destination. Destination countries like those of the Gulf region, boasting economies that rely solely on the contributions of migrant workers, allow for "temporary labour migration", offering near-impossible pathways to permanency, and no likelihood of family reunification for lower to lower-middle income migrants. As a result, migrants' lives are in limbo, grappling lack of stability, many times returning to their COOs empty-handed due to low wages in CODs, and few opportunities to invest and recuperate in their COOs.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE TRIPLE-WIN NARRATIVE

The 'triple-win' narrative assumes that return is safe, voluntary, and sustainable. For climate-affected communities, these assumptions no longer hold. In many regions, environmental degradation, sea-level rise, salinisation, and ecosystem collapse have undermined livelihoods, housing, and cultural practices.

Returning people to places where survival conditions are deteriorating reframes mobility as a temporary deviation rather than a legitimate adaptation strategy. In this sense, return becomes a form of risk externalisation, shifting responsibility away from major emitters and host states onto already vulnerable communities.

RESPONSIBILITY, REINTEGRATION, AND ALTERNATIVES

When reintegration fails, responsibility is often obscured. Destination states disavow accountability after expulsion, while COOs are expected to absorb returnees despite limited capacity. Migrants, inevitably, are left to bear the consequences of structural failures they did not create.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recognise the right to stay, particularly where return undermines dignity, or safety, or fails as a sustainable solution, especially for climate-affected countries
2. Expand the regularisation pathways in place of return and sourcing new talent
3. Invest in social protection and benefit portability, including for long-term migrant workers' commitment by COOs in bilateral agreements negotiated within a rights and protection framework
4. Build programmes and allocating resources to assist and reintegrate migrants in rebuilding their lives upon their return home
5. Treat mobility as a continuum, not a cycle with a mandatory endpoint
6. Integrate historical responsibility and climate justice into migration governance
7. Capitalise on the opportunities and benefits that migrants bring to CODs and granting them dignity, human rights, and sustainable futures, including access to inclusion, regularisation pathways, integration, and reintegration.
8. Return must not be promoted where environmental degradation, climate impacts or disaster risks make return unsafe, unsustainable or incompatible with human dignity.

When placed in its proper historical context, return and reintegration policies reveal enduring inequalities on how mobility is valued and controlled. The expectation that migrants must return while colonial settlement was normalised reflects unresolved power asymmetries. Moving beyond return-centered governance toward regularisation, protection, and shared responsibility is not only more effective; it is a necessary step toward justice.

THE POWER OF RESISTANCE IN MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

Resistance is Not Optional; It is Structural

The discussion on the “power of resistance” makes one thing unmistakably clear: Migrant rights are never recognised[1] voluntarily. They are fought for, negotiated, demanded/insisted on, and reclaimed over time. Every gain, whether regularisation, labour protection, or social recognition, is the result of sustained pressure, not a by-product of institutional goodwill.

The current global context reinforces this reality. Migration governance is increasingly shaped by restriction, securitisation, and political opportunism. Migrants, particularly those from the Global South, are framed as economic burdens, security risks, or political tools. At the same time, their labour sustains entire economies.

The GFMG webinar case discussed regularisation efforts and resistance movements in Spain, which exposed these deeper truths: Resistance is the only currently viable mechanism through which migrants become visible, legible, and politically relevant. Without resistance, invisibility becomes policy.

This GFMG Outcome Document/Report argues that resistance in migration governance operates on three interconnected levels:

1. As a response to systemic exclusion and racialised inequality
2. As a strategy for political recognition and a matter of recognition, protection, and promotion.
3. As a continuous process, not a one-time achievement

RIGHTS: FORCED INTO EXISTENCE, NOT GRANTED

The narrative that governments “decide” to regularise migrants or improve conditions is fundamentally misleading. The Spanish example makes this clear. Regularisation did not emerge from political generosity; it emerged from organised pressure: through marches, mobilisation, collective action, and sustained advocacy.

Migrant communities walked, occupied spaces, gathered signatures, built alliances, and forced the issue into the political agenda. Even then, the process was delayed, contested, and nearly derailed by political infighting.

This pattern is consistent globally. Governments act when public/civic pressure escalates until it becomes inescapable. Resistance transforms migrants from invisible labour into political actors and agents for both development and change.

The implication is direct and apparent: **Without organised and sustained resistance, there is no policy change.**

ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE COEXISTS WITH SOCIAL EXCLUSION

One of the most uncomfortable truths exposed in the GFMG webinar series discussions is this: For CODs, migrants are economically indispensable, but socially disposable.

They harvest food, sustain care systems, deliver services, and fill labor shortages. Entire sectors depend on their labour. Yet, they are denied legal recognition, paid lower wages, excluded from protections, and subjected to discrimination.

Unfortunately, this is not a contradiction; it is a model.

Keeping migrants in irregular or precarious status benefits economic systems that rely on cheap, flexible, and controllable labour. Regularisation becomes a political calculation, and not a moral decision.

Even when regularisation occurs, it is often framed as a response to labour market needs, rather than a recognition of rights. **Consequently, migrants are valued for their utility, not their humanity.**

However, resistance disrupts this model by forcing recognition beyond economic function.

RACIALISATION SHAPES WHO IS TARGETED

The discussion clearly highlighted that not all migrants are treated equally. African migrants, in particular, face intensified surveillance, criminalisation, and dehumanisation.

This is not about numbers. African migrants may represent a smaller proportion of the population, yet they are disproportionately targeted in political narratives, media representation, and law enforcement practices.

The issue is not migration, it is racialisation.

Migration governance is deeply entangled with race. Certain bodies are marked as “undesirable,” “illegal,” or “threatening,” regardless of actual behaviour or contribution. This produces layered systems of discrimination:

- Direct racism (policing, exclusion, violence)
- Structural racism (housing, labour access, legal barriers)
- Narrative racism (media framing, political discourse)

Resistance, in this context, is not only about legal status; it is about dignity, identity, and visibility.

SOLIDARITY: WEAK WHERE MOST NEEDED

One of the most critical and uncomfortable insights from the discussion is the fragmentation among migrant communities themselves.

When African migrants face eviction or violence, broader migrant solidarity is often absent. When one group is targeted, others may not mobilise.

The systems that exploit migrants rely on division: By nationality, race, legal status, and sector. If migrant communities do not act collectively, policies will continue to target them selectively.

Solidarity cannot be symbolic. It must be operational. Without cross-community mobilisation, resistance remains localised and easier to suppress.

RESISTANCE DOES NOT END WITH POLICY WINS

Regularisation is often framed as an endpoint. It is not.

Legal status does not eliminate exploitation. Migrants continue to face:

- Wage discrimination
- Occupational segregation
- Limited upward mobility
- Barriers to housing, social services, and justice

Even with documentation, migrants are often confined to low-wage sectors and excluded from full participation.

Resistance must therefore evolve. It must move from:

- Legal recognition to economic justice
- Visibility to equality
- Survival to dignity

If resistance stops at regularisation, structural inequality remains intact.

MIGRATION TIED TO GLOBAL INEQUALITY

The GFMG webinar series discussions also raised a critical point that is often ignored: **Migration is not just about destination countries.**

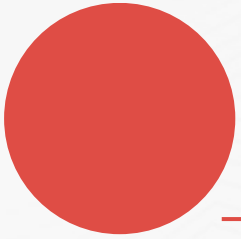
COOs are losing labour, youth, and human capital. Migration becomes a necessity due to lack of opportunity, governance failures, and global inequality.

At the same time, destination countries benefit from this labour without bearing the cost of education, upbringing, or social investment.

This is a transfer of value from poorer regions to wealthier economies. Resistance must therefore also address global inequality, not just national policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Resistance cannot remain segmented by nationality or identity. Migrant groups must actively organise across communities, recognising that policies targeting one group will eventually expand to others. Collective defense mechanisms must be established so that no group faces repression in isolation.
2. Protests and campaigns are necessary, but insufficient. Long-term organisational structures, community networks, legal support systems, worker collectives must be strengthened to sustain pressure beyond moments of crisis or policy opportunity.
3. Migrant communities must actively confront narratives that criminalise and dehumanise them. This includes producing counter-narratives that highlight contribution, dignity, and structural injustice while refusing labels that legitimise exclusion.
4. Advocacy must move beyond regularisation demands to address labour exploitation, wage inequality, and unsafe working conditions. Legal status without economic justice reproduces vulnerability in a different form.
5. Resistance must operate transnationally. Governments of origin must be held accountable for protecting their citizens abroad, while destination states must be pressured to uphold rights. Diaspora networks play a critical role in bridging this gap.
6. When evictions, deportations, or abuses occur, responses must be immediate, coordinated, and visible. This requires pre-existing communication networks and clear mobilisation protocols.
7. Migrant communities must be equipped not only to resist but to negotiate, organise, and lead. Knowledge of legal frameworks, policy processes, and rights mechanisms strengthens long-term influence and effective agency.
8. Indigenous Peoples have resisted displacement for generations through stewardship of lands, waters and oceans. Climate mobility governance should recognise Indigenous leadership as essential rather than supplementary.



MIGRATION GOVERNANCE IN TIMES OF CRISES

The current global moment is anything but stable. Armed conflict is expanding across regions. Economic tensions are escalating. Trade wars, military aggression, and geopolitical competition are reshaping migration patterns in real time.

Yet, migration governance continues to operate as if these crises are temporary disruptions rather than structural conditions.

The GFMG webinar discussion during made one point unmistakably clear: Migrant workers are not only affected by crises; they are systematically exposed, unprotected, and deprioritised within crisis response systems. Whether in the Middle East, Africa, or the Pacific, the pattern is consistent: **When systems collapse, migrants absorb the shock.**

This GFMG Outcome Document/Report argues that migration governance in times of crises is failing on three levels:

1. It does not account for conflict as a central driver of migration and vulnerability.
2. It lacks preparedness and protection mechanisms for migrants during crises.
3. It continues to prioritise state security and geopolitical interests over human survival.

MIGRATION GOVERNANCE DETACHED FROM POLITICAL REALITY

One of the most critical tensions raised in the GFMG webinar session was the disconnect between global migration discussions and real-world political conditions.

While wars expand, civilians are displaced, and migrant workers are stranded, as international forums continue to frame migration governance as a technical exercise. Reports focus on 'progress,' indicators, and commitments, while avoiding direct confrontation with ongoing crises.

This creates a dangerous illusion that migration governance can be discussed in isolation from war, militarisation, and geopolitical power.

When migrants are caught in conflict zones, when boats are attacked at sea, when deportations to third countries increase, these are not peripheral issues. They are central to migration governance. Avoiding these realities does not neutralise them. It normalises them.

MIGRANT WORKERS SYSTEMATICALLY EXCLUDED FROM CRISIS-RELATED PROTECTION

The lived experiences shared in this particular GFMF webinar session expose a consistent pattern: Migrant workers are the least protected population during crises.

They face:

- Restricted mobility due to canceled flights and border closures
- Wage theft and sudden loss of income
- Lack of evacuation support from employers or States
- Limited access to justice and social protection systems
- Heightened surveillance and restrictions on expression

Even basic rights movement, communication, and safety become conditional.

Meanwhile, evacuation efforts often prioritise citizens of wealthier countries. Migrant workers from developing countries are expected to remain, endure, and survive with minimal support. This is not simply a failure of logistics. It is a reflection of a hierarchy of values in standard practice.

REACTIVE AND INEFFECTIVE CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEMS

The GFMG webinar session repeatedly highlighted a critical failure: Governments remain unprepared for predictable crises.

COVID-19 exposed this. Nothing has fundamentally changed since.

COOs still lack:

- Emergency evacuation plans
- Reintegration systems for returning workers
- Financial support mechanisms for sudden job loss

CODs still lack:

- Inclusive social protection systems
- Labour safeguards during emergencies
- Accountability mechanisms for employer abuse

The result is a cycle of dilatory/inadequate reactions: When crises happen, governments scramble, and migrants absorb the damage.

GOVERNANCE BREAKS DOWN UNDER PRESSURE; REPLACED BY INFORMAL SYSTEMS

The example of conflict-affected regions shows that migration governance does not collapse instantly. It erodes.

Borders become porous. Documentation systems fail. Data disappears. Institutions lose visibility.

In this vacuum, other actors step in, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Humanitarian organisations
- Local communities
- Informal networks

While these actors provide essential support, they do not replace governance. Instead, they create fragmented systems where standards vary, coordination is weak, and accountability is unclear.

Governance may not disappear altogether, but it becomes inconsistent, uneven, and unreliable.

For migrants, this means navigating systems that are unpredictable, often contradictory, and even untenable.

SECURITY NARRATIVES OVERRIDE HUMAN RIGHTS

In times of crises, governments default to security-first responses:

- Roadblocks and movement restrictions
- Surveillance and censorship
- Criminalisation of mobility

These measures are often justified as necessary. However, they have consequences:

- They push migration into irregular channels.
- They reduce trust between communities and authorities.
- They increase vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation.

Most critically, they redefine migrants as security risks rather than rights holders with agency.

CONVERGING CLIMATE, CONFLICT, AND INEQUALITY

Climate change is intensifying displacement. Conflict is expanding instability. Economic inequality is driving migration.

These forces are interconnected; yet governance frameworks treat them separately.

For example:

- Climate mobility is discussed without addressing militarisation.
- Conflict displacement is addressed without linking to labour migration systems.
- Economic migration is treated as voluntary despite structural pressures.

MIGRANTS FORCED TO RELY ON THEMSELVES

Perhaps the most revealing insight from this GFMG webinar session was this: **In the absence of state protection, migrants protect each other.**

Community-led responses emerged immediately through:

- Food distribution initiatives
- Mental health support
- Information sharing networks

These are not supplementary; they are survival systems.

This reality exposes a deeper failure. When migrants resort to becoming their own safety nets, the clear indication is that governance has already failed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing these failures requires structural change, not incremental adjustments. Crises are not anomalies; they must be treated as permanent conditions within migration governance.

1. Global forums must explicitly address war, militarisation, and geopolitical instability. Migration discussions cannot remain technical while crises define lived reality. Policy frameworks must reflect the conditions migrants actually face.
2. COOs and CODs must develop binding crisis-response mechanisms, including evacuation protocols, emergency income support, and reintegration systems. Preparedness cannot remain voluntary or reactive.
3. Access to healthcare, income support, and basic services must be extended to migrant workers during crises. Exclusion from social protection systems is one of the primary drivers of vulnerability.
4. Wage theft, contract termination, and abandonment of workers during crises must carry enforceable penalties. Labour rights cannot be suspended during conflict or instability.
5. Crisis response must prioritise human safety over border control. Policies that restrict movement, increase surveillance, and criminalise migrants must be critically reassessed.
6. Local governments and grassroots organisations are often the first responders. They must be adequately resourced, recognised, and integrated into formal governance structures rather than treated as secondary actors.
7. Migration governance during crises cannot be managed by individual States alone. Regional and international coordination must ensure that protection responsibilities are shared, not fragmented, compartmentalised, and outsourced.
8. Climate change is not a future crisis for peoples of Asia, Latin Americas and the Pacific; it is a present reality. Migration governance systems must move beyond emergency responses and invest in long-term resilience, adaptation, mobility pathways and community-led solutions.

Reflections from the Mentees

Series 2 & 3: "Mixed Migration in Focus & Complementarity Between the GCM and the GCR" and "Migration and Development – The Elusive Link"

I gained valuable insight that migration ontologies—especially for youth—are context-specific rather than universal. These engagements further reinforced that policy revisions must be grounded in the lived realities of diverse populations, as experiences differ across class and key demographic groups.

–Daphne Tengende, Zimbabwe

Series 3: 'Migration and Development – the Elusive Link'

This strengthened my understanding that migration is not a peripheral issue but a core development concern. As the country with one of the largest diasporic populations in the world, India's migration governance is critically important in shaping external engagement and development outcomes. At the same time, the session prompted me to reflect on the scale and significance of internal migration in India, which plays a central role in labour market dynamics, urbanisation, and regional disparities. It also sharpened my perspective on structural challenges such as informality, gaps in social protection, and the vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers, reinforcing the idea that migration must be viewed as an integral component of India's broader development trajectory.

– Dr. Abhishek Yadav, India.

Series 4: Communication and Storytelling to Shape Migration Narratives Confirmation

I would like to share some recommendations as follows:

- Localize messaging: Translate migration policies into major local languages and share via radio, social media, community theatre, and faith-based gatherings to reach all demographics.
- Empower trusted voices: Train community leaders, youth, and returnee migrants worldwide to share accurate, rights-based stories that counter misinformation.
- Humanize policy: Governments and CSOs should produce videos, podcasts, and testimonies showing real migrant experiences highlighting safe pathways and risks of irregular routes.

–Chimwemwe Banda, Malawi

Series 8: Return and Readmission "Is it a triple win or failure of the Development and Human Rights Agenda?"

We as returnees have been facing very big challenges in our host country (Uganda) as there are no clear programs laid for reintegrating returnees. This in contrast to remittances from migrants' labour and other revenue from the sector.

Returnees need support in initiating small business to help sustain themselves and their families. Further, some returnees continue to face psychosocial challenges without adequate assistance (e.g. access to and effective referral centres).

–Kafeero Aziz, Uganda

Series 8: Return and Readmission "Is it a triple win or failure of the Development and Human Rights Agenda?"

Voluntary return should be voluntary in all its features not forced returns masked as "voluntary". What we experience these days is that migrants are meant to choose situations that put them between the devil and the deep blue sea. These migrants end up choosing the return option which they think is better. Most times, the option of regularization is not available especially when the situation is that of irregularity. Return should be used as a last resort after all options of regularization is exhausted especially when the migrant has contributed positively to the host country.

– Osato Mary Igbinosun, Nigeria

