



The COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity to reimagine human mobility

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Today, the Secretary-General has urged that global efforts to manage the COVID-19 crisis will depend upon public health responses and a comprehensive recovery that include *all* people. The United Nations Network on Migration welcomes the Secretary-General's policy guidance on [COVID-19 and People on the Move](#), which provides key lessons from the pandemic that can guide us in advancing safe and inclusive mobility. No one will be safe from the pandemic until everybody is safe.

COVID-19 is presenting critical challenges for humans everywhere. Restrictions on human mobility are exposing many people on the move to significant risks, impacting their human rights and well-being, impeding our collective response to the pandemic, and threatening our ability to ensure a recovery in which no-one is left behind. But this current environment is also an opportunity for us to reimagine how migration can be governed in a more humane and effective way, during and after this crisis.

Closed borders and mobility restrictions have seen women, men, girls and boys trapped in precarious situations. Migrants are being forcibly returned, stranded in transit, denied assistance due to restricted access to territories, and held in detention – simply because of their migratory status – despite enormous risks to their health. In the COVID-19 response, migrants have provided critical labour across sectors like health, transport, construction and agriculture, with women migrant workers taking on significant care responsibilities. Yet, migrants have been frequently excluded from health and socio-economic protections, with many vulnerable to high levels of temporary, informal or unprotected work. These actions both violate fundamental human rights and undermine collective efforts to contain and rollback the virus.

The Network calls upon the international community to act now upon these recommendations from the Secretary-General. We have a strong framework to do so in the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration \(GCM\)](#), the cornerstone for international coordination and cooperation on migration. This landmark multilateral achievement recognises that shared responsibility and innovative solutions are critical to address the challenges and opportunities of migration. As with fighting COVID-19, no country can do this on its own.

The GCM provides practical solutions to the greatest challenges in migration, now amplified by the pandemic. This includes commitments by states to ensure access to basic services for all migrants regardless of status and generate a more humane and constructive perception of migrants and migration. It recognises the need to ensure that migrants can effectively contribute to their countries of destination and be compensated for such efforts without discrimination. It outlines actions needed by states to expand and diversify pathways for regular migration and implement their commitments to facilitate safe and dignified returns; to use immigration detention only as a last resort and end the detention of children and families; and to enable the faster, safer and cheaper transfer of remittances.

The Secretary-General has reiterated that an effective recovery from COVID-19 requires national and global responses that include all people, if governments are to fulfil the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind. Many States are leading the way, implementing their GCM commitments and taking action to reduce the vulnerabilities of migrants in the context of COVID-19. This has included regularising migrants, extending permits to stay and work, ensuring access to basic health services and social protections, and releasing migrants from immigration detention into community-based alternatives.

The Network urges all governments to follow suit and has called for [efforts to confront a rise in xenophobia](#), [a moratorium on the use of immigration detention](#), [the suspension of forced returns](#) and enhanced access to services for migrants in COVID-19 responses. The Network will work with governments to replicate and enhance promising practices that have emerged during this crisis – encouraging and facilitating joint efforts, sharing learnings from stakeholders on the ground, and assisting states to implement the GCM nationally in ways that respond to the pandemic.

Together, we must find solutions where protection of the rights of all people – whoever they are – is accepted both as an obligation and a social good, where no ‘essential worker’ needs to remain undocumented and be deprived of fair entitlements, where fear and xenophobia are discouraged not promoted, where we value and recognize the vital contribution that migrants make to our societies. We have been reminded by the Secretary-General that the exclusion of people on the move is the same reason they are among the most vulnerable to this pandemic today. Inclusion will pay off and is the only way that we can emerge from this crisis and overcome COVID-19.

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