



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
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# 138<sup>th</sup> IPU ASSEMBLY AND RELATED MEETINGS

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## Concept note on the theme of the General Debate *Strengthening the global regime for migrants and refugees: the need for evidence- based policy solutions*

Around the world, nearly 258 million people – or about 3.4 per cent of the total population - reside in countries not of their birth. They include migrants – whether regular or irregular – in search of a better life – and refugees who have fled their countries because of persecution, conflict, natural disaster or other catastrophic events that jeopardize their safety and life. Their numbers are expected to grow as a result of social, economic, environmental or political instability combined with the search for new opportunities in an increasingly inter-connected world.

Migration has long been part of the fabric of civilization. However, today's loosely-constructed global regime to govern the movement of people between countries of origin, transit and destination is proving insufficient. Political will and a human rights approach are required to address the many legal, socio-economic and political issues that migrants and refugees, as well as host communities and countries of origin and transit, present on the ground. Mixed migration flows add an additional layer of complexity.

Further to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include distinct commitments on migration, in September 2016 the United Nations adopted a major Declaration to address large movements of refugees and migrants. Among other things, the Declaration called for two distinct global compacts, one on migrants, and another on refugees. After a year-long consultative process, the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)* and the *Global Compact for Refugees (GCR)* will be negotiated in parallel between February and July 2018. Formal adoption of the agreements will take place respectively later in the year.

The IPU facilitated the parliamentary contribution to these processes. Building on the Declaration from its 133<sup>rd</sup> Assembly in October 2015, on *the imperative for fairer, smarter and more human migration*, the IPU participated in a number of thematic debates on the GCM and the GCR and in the final "stocktaking" meeting that took place in Puerto Vallarta (Mexico) and in Geneva in December 2017 respectively. A meeting on *Promoting better regional cooperation towards smart and humane migration across the Mediterranean* was held in Malta on 16-17 November. A number of IPU resolutions, including the 2014 Resolution on protecting the rights of unaccompanied migrant children, have also helped formulate a number of policy recommendations. The 2018 Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, organized with the President of the General Assembly, with a focus on the GCM, is scheduled for 22 and 23 February.



#IPU138

Concurrent with the general debate of the 138<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly, the IPU Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights will hold a debate on the GCM as a first step toward a formal resolution to be adopted at the 139<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly in October 2018.

With respect to refugees in particular, through its Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law, the IPU has long advocated the rights of refugees, stateless people and displaced people due to persecution, conflict or political strife. Recent public debates by the Committee have included humanitarian responses to forced displacement and the role of parliaments in securing adequate follow-up to the forthcoming Global Compact for Refugees. Over the years, the IPU has produced handbooks for parliamentarians on refugee protection and adopted a number of relevant resolutions. Together with UNHCR, a workshop on refugee protection will be held during the Assembly, with the aim of securing further input from the IPU Members on this issue.

From the IPU debates held so far it is clear that migration and refugee protection are in fact major issues for parliamentarians everywhere. These debates helped generate support for the following broad conclusions:

- Migration can generate positive outcomes provided that pro-active policies for the social and economic development of both migrants and resident populations are effectively implemented;
- Local – national – regional –worldwide perspectives and inter-connections need to be factored in when devising policy solutions;
- The drivers of irregular migration need to be addressed and regular channels for migration sought to avoid negative impacts on countries of origin, to make the migration flow more manageable for destination countries, and to prevent exploitation or abuse of migrants themselves;
- Migrants and refugees are entitled to the same human rights as all other people, requiring governments to observe due process and take measures to uphold those rights, beginning by observing the principle of non-discrimination; refugees also have specific rights associated with their particular predicament and need for international protection.
- The political discourse around migration and refugees should promote healthy debate in society on the basis of evidence, avoiding negative stereotypes;
- Accommodating significant flows of refugees and migrants requires effective responses and burden- and responsibility-sharing mechanisms;
- Women and children are particularly at risk of abuse and discrimination within the migrant and asylum-seeking population, thus requiring special protection and dedicated measures to empower them and uphold their rights;
- Existing international treaties and other agreements, including those on the rights of migrant workers and refugees, need to be universally ratified, applied consistently and fully;
- The right to seek asylum must be guaranteed at all times, so that persons fleeing persecution can have their claim duly heard with due process, including in the context of mixed migration;
- Each country needs a comprehensive policy to address issues associated with migrants and refugees.

### General Debate Guidelines

As a complement to the various contributions that the IPU has made to the processes for the GCM and GCR respectively, the general debate of the 138<sup>th</sup> Assembly will be structured in such a way as to:

- Engage and garner input from *each* member of parliament in attendance;
- Produce a focused outcome around a number of practical questions.

To this effect, the IPU will develop a short **survey questionnaire** to be filled out by each Member of Parliament (excluding staff) participating in the assembly. The questionnaire will be circulated by **22 February** with a deadline of no later than **9 March**. The results of the questionnaire will be published a few days before the start of the Assembly.

Delegations will be invited to take stock of the survey exercise and to address some or all of the results in their interventions during the general debate.