Forum: **Fourth Committee**
Question of: **Discussing a United Immigration Policy for UN States**
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I. Description of the Issue

International migration has become one of the defining political, humanitarian, and socioeconomic issues of the 21st century. People move across borders for many reasons, including employment, education, family reunification, environmental degradation, political instability, persecution, and armed conflict. While migration can contribute significantly to economic growth, innovation, cultural exchange, and development, it can also create major challenges when migration systems are fragmented, underfunded, or politicized.

The issue before the Third Committee is not whether sovereign states should lose control over their borders. Rather, it concerns whether the international community can move toward a more united and coordinated immigration policy framework among United Nations Member States. At present, there is no universal immigration code or binding global migration system governing how states should regulate admission, residence, integration, returns, or cooperation on migration management. Instead, migration governance is spread across domestic legislation, regional agreements, bilateral arrangements, and a range of international legal obligations and policy frameworks.

This fragmented approach has several consequences. First, migrants often face inconsistent legal standards and unequal access to protection depending on where they travel. Second, countries of transit and destination may experience significant pressure on border management systems, asylum systems, labor markets, and public services. Third, a lack of regular migration pathways can increase the use of dangerous routes and strengthen smuggling networks. Fourth, when migration and refugee protection are conflated, people in need of international protection may be denied access to asylum or returned to unsafe conditions.

The topic is especially relevant to the Third Committee because migration is deeply connected to human dignity, non-discrimination, family unity, children's rights, labor exploitation, trafficking, social inclusion, and access to protection. A more united immigration framework would not necessarily mean one identical system for all states, but rather a common set of principles and cooperative mechanisms to make migration safer, more orderly, and more humane.

II. Definition of Key Terms

Migration

Migration refers broadly to the movement of people away from their usual place of residence, whether within a country or across an international border, and whether temporary or permanent.

Immigration

Immigration refers specifically to the movement of people into a foreign country with the intention of residing there temporarily or permanently.

Emigration

Emigration refers to leaving one's country of origin or habitual residence in order to settle elsewhere.

Migrant

There is no single universally binding legal definition of "migrant" in international law. In practice, the term often refers to a person who moves away from their usual residence, usually across an international border, for a variety of reasons such as work, education, family reunification, or better living conditions. Some organizations use the term broadly, while others distinguish more sharply between migrants and persons in need of international protection.

Refugee

A refugee is a person who is outside their country of nationality or habitual residence and is unable or unwilling to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution or because of serious

threats to life, freedom, or safety. Refugees are protected under international refugee law, most importantly the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

Asylum seeker

An asylum seeker is a person who has applied for recognition as a refugee and is waiting for a final decision on that application.

Irregular migration

Irregular migration refers to movement that takes place outside the legal and regulatory framework of the countries of origin, transit, or destination. This may concern irregular entry, stay, or work.

Mixed migration

Mixed migration describes movements in which people with different legal statuses and motivations travel together on the same routes, such as refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, trafficking victims, and labor migrants.

Non-refoulement

Non-refoulement is the principle that no person should be returned to a territory where they face persecution, torture, or other serious harm. It is a cornerstone of refugee protection and is also linked to human rights law.

Human trafficking

Human trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, or harboring of persons through force, coercion, deception, or abuse of vulnerability for the purpose of exploitation.

Human smuggling

Human smuggling generally refers to the facilitation of irregular border crossing for financial or material benefit. Unlike trafficking, it does not necessarily involve exploitation after arrival, though the distinction can blur in practice.

Integration

Integration describes the process through which migrants become part of the social, economic, cultural, and political life of the host society while retaining their dignity and rights.

III. Background information

Migration as a global phenomenon

International migration is a longstanding feature of human history, but globalization, demographic change, labor market inequality, conflict, environmental stress, and easier communication have intensified and diversified migration flows. Contemporary migration is not limited to one region. It includes labor migration from South Asia to the Gulf, displacement from conflict zones in the Middle East and Africa, mixed movements across the Mediterranean, migration through Latin America toward North America, and regional mobility within Africa and Asia.

Migration can bring substantial benefits. Migrants contribute labor, skills, entrepreneurship, tax revenue, and remittances. Countries with aging populations may rely on migrant workers in sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, logistics, construction, and domestic work. Countries of origin often benefit from remittances and diaspora networks. At the same time, migration can also create challenges if governance systems are weak. These may include overcrowded reception systems, administrative backlogs, labor exploitation, xenophobia, trafficking risks, and social tensions amplified by misinformation or domestic political polarization.

Why migration governance is fragmented

Unlike trade, aviation, or maritime law, international migration has never been governed by a single comprehensive global treaty establishing a full common legal regime for admission and stay. Immigration control has traditionally been seen as a core element of state sovereignty. For that reason, states have generally resisted legally binding global rules that would dictate who they must admit, how many people they must receive, or what categories of immigration they must create.

Instead, migration governance has developed in layers:

- national law, which determines visas, border procedures, residence permits, work authorization and deportation rules;
- regional systems, such as the European Union's migration and asylum rules or regional labor mobility agreements;
- international human rights law, which protects all persons regardless of migration status;
- refugee law, which protects refugees and asylum seekers;
- anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling frameworks;
- soft law and policy frameworks, including the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration.

The result is a system in which the rights and experiences of migrants can differ dramatically depending on the route taken, the country entered, and the legal category assigned to them.

The challenge of mixed migration

One of the most difficult issues in current migration governance is the rise of mixed movements. In many regions, people traveling together may include:

- refugees fleeing war or persecution,
- asylum seekers,
- labor migrants,
- victims of trafficking,include the following:
- stateless persons,
- unaccompanied children,
- and people displaced by disasters or economic collapse.

This creates pressure on border authorities and asylum systems. If states fail to distinguish properly between different categories of people on the move, refugees may be denied protection, while other migrants may be left without clear legal pathways or assistance. UNHCR has stressed that migration policies must not undermine refugee protection and that refugees should not be treated as merely one subcategory of migrants.

The Global Compact for Migration

The most important global framework for this topic is the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM), adopted in 2018 following the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The GCM is the first intergovernmentally negotiated UN agreement covering international migration in a comprehensive way. It is non-legally binding, but it represents a major step toward common principles and coordinated governance.

The GCM contains 23 objectives, including:

- collecting and using accurate migration data,
- minimizing adverse drivers of migration,
- providing identity documents,
- enhancing legal pathways,
- addressing vulnerabilities in migration,
- saving lives and coordinating international efforts on missing migrants,
- combating smuggling and trafficking,
- ensuring migrants have access to basic services,
- eliminating discrimination,
- and facilitating safe and dignified return and reintegration.

For delegates, the GCM is central because it demonstrates both the possibilities and limits of international cooperation. It shows that states are willing to endorse common principles, but it also reflects their insistence on preserving sovereignty and national policy discretion.

The legal distinction between migrants and refugees

A major challenge in public debate is the tendency to blur the distinction between migration management and refugee protection. This distinction is essential. Refugees are protected by a specific legal regime, including the right to seek asylum and protection against refoulement. Migrants more broadly are protected by human rights law, labor law, and other legal norms, but not every migrant qualifies for refugee status.

In practice, however, the distinction is not always simple. A person may leave because of conflict, food insecurity, state collapse, gang violence, climate stress, economic desperation, or a combination of several factors. Delegates should therefore avoid simplistic assumptions and instead focus on building systems that are capable of identifying vulnerabilities and processing claims fairly.

Root causes of migration

A united immigration framework cannot focus only on border procedures. Migration is driven by structural factors that include the following:

- poverty and unemployment,
- inequality between regions,
- political instability and conflict,
- persecution and human rights abuses,
- climate change and environmental degradation,
- food insecurity,
- family separation,
- demographic imbalances,
- and demand for labor in destination countries.

This means that long-term migration governance also depends on development cooperation, peacebuilding, climate adaptation, human rights protection, and legal labor mobility.

Current policy tensions

A more united immigration policy must address several ongoing tensions:

1. Border control vs. protection

States want to prevent irregular entry and combat smuggling, but restrictive border practices can also push people toward more dangerous routes or block access to asylum.

2. Domestic political pressure vs. international solidarity

Migration is often politically contentious. Governments may face pressure to reduce arrivals even when international cooperation would require them to share responsibilities more equitably.

3. Labor needs vs. restrictive admission systems

Many economies depend on migrant labor, yet legal pathways are often too narrow, slow, or inaccessible.

4. Security concerns vs. non-discrimination

Migration debates are frequently securitized. While security screening is legitimate, policies that stigmatize migrants as threats can fuel discrimination and rights violations.

5. Return policies vs. dignity and safety

States often seek to return people without legal status, but returns must respect due process, family unity, non-refoulement, and humane treatment.

(Historical background)

IV. Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Because migration is global, no small list can fully capture all relevant actors. However, the following categories are especially important:

Major destination states

These include states receiving significant numbers of labor migrants, asylum seekers, or mixed migration arrivals, such as the United States, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, Canada, Türkiye, Gulf states, and South Africa. Such states often shape debates on admission, integration, border control, and return.

Major transit states

Transit states play a key role because migrants and refugees often pass through them on the way to other destinations. These may include Mexico, Libya, Tunisia, Niger, Türkiye, and several Balkan states, among others. Transit states often demand more international support and responsibility-sharing.

Major countries of origin

Countries experiencing economic hardship, instability, conflict, or large-scale emigration are central to the debate. These include, in different regional contexts, Syria, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Sudan, Myanmar, and many others. Countries of origin often emphasize development, legal mobility, remittances, and protection of their nationals abroad.

Refugee-hosting states

A number of lower- and middle-income countries host very large refugee populations despite limited resources. Their perspective is crucial in debates about burden-sharing, financing, and access to services.

Major Organizations

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

IOM is the leading intergovernmental organization on migration. It supports states on migration governance, data collection, mobility pathways, returns, border management, and humanitarian assistance.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR protects refugees, asylum seekers, returnees, stateless persons, and other forcibly displaced people. It plays a crucial role in ensuring that migration policies do not undermine refugee protection.

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

OHCHR monitors the human rights implications of migration policies, including detention, discrimination, family separation, and treatment at borders.

International Labour Organization (ILO)

The ILO is relevant for migrant workers' rights, decent work standards, recruitment practices, and labor exploitation.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF focuses on children on the move, including access to education, protection from trafficking and detention, and family unity.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

UNODC is relevant to anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking efforts.

V. Timeline of events

1948: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms, among other rights, the right to leave any country and to seek asylum from persecution.

1951: Adoption of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

1967: Adoption of the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, expanding the temporal and geographic scope of refugee protection.

1990: Adoption of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

2000: Adoption of the Palermo Protocols on trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants.

2015: Large mixed migration movements, especially toward Europe, intensify global debate on migration governance and burden-sharing.

2016: UN Member States adopt the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, committing to stronger cooperation and launching processes for the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Migration.

2018: Adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration in Marrakesh.

2022: First International Migration Review Forum assesses progress on implementation of the Global Compact.

2025 and beyond: Continued global displacement, mixed migration flows, labor shortages in many regions, and climate-related mobility pressures keep migration governance high on the UN agenda.

VI. Previous attempts to solve the issue

Refugee law and asylum systems

The 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol remain the core legal instruments for refugee protection. While they do not regulate immigration as a whole, they shape the treatment of many people on the move by guaranteeing access to protection for those who qualify as refugees.

Human rights treaties

A range of human rights treaties protect migrants regardless of status, including protections against torture, arbitrary detention, discrimination, and collective expulsion. These frameworks provide minimum standards but do not create a comprehensive immigration regime.

Migrant workers' rights instruments

The 1990 Migrant Workers Convention seeks to protect migrant workers and their families, but ratification has remained limited, especially among major destination countries. This limits its practical global reach.

Anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling frameworks

The Palermo Protocols have shaped international cooperation against trafficking and smuggling, but enforcement and victim protection remain uneven.

Regional migration systems

Regional frameworks have attempted to coordinate migration in more practical ways. The European Union, for example, has developed common asylum and migration rules, though these remain politically contested. Other regions have labor mobility and free movement arrangements of varying scope.

The Global Compact for Migration

The GCM is the most significant recent attempt to build a cooperative international migration framework. It does not impose binding obligations, but it gives states a common language and agenda for improving migration governance, expanding regular pathways, and protecting migrants' rights. Its non-binding nature has also been one of its main limitations, since implementation depends entirely on political will and national capacity.

VII. Possible solutions

A realistic resolution on this topic should not attempt to abolish sovereign immigration systems. Instead, it should focus on common standards, cooperation mechanisms, and rights-based governance. Possible solutions include the following:

Establishing UN-guided minimum standards for migration governance

Member States could agree on minimum standards regarding:

- humane reception conditions,
- access to interpretation and legal information,
- child-sensitive procedures,

- family unity,
- alternatives to immigration detention,
- access to emergency healthcare,
- and safeguards against discrimination and abuse.

Protecting asylum and refugee law within broader migration policy

A united immigration policy must explicitly reaffirm the following:

- the right to seek asylum,
- the principle of non-refoulement,
- fair and efficient refugee status determination,
- and special protection for vulnerable groups such as children, trafficking survivors, and stateless persons.

Expanding safe and regular pathways

One of the most effective ways to reduce dangerous journeys and smuggling is to create more lawful pathways, such as the following:

- labor migration schemes,
- student mobility programs,
- family reunification channels,
- humanitarian admission pathways,
- community sponsorship models,
- and regional mobility agreements.

Strengthening responsibility-sharing

States under disproportionate pressure, whether as countries of origin, transit, or destination, should receive stronger international support through the following:

- financial assistance,
- technical capacity-building,
- resettlement and relocation commitments,
- development cooperation,
- and data-sharing support.

Improving migration data and early-warning systems

Better data can help states anticipate migration pressures, plan reception capacity, identify risks, and respond more effectively to sudden crises. This should be done in a way that protects privacy and does not expose migrants to surveillance abuse.

Addressing trafficking, smuggling and exploitation

States should improve:

- cross-border law enforcement cooperation,
- victim identification and referral systems,
- labor inspections,
- ethical recruitment frameworks,
- and accountability for those profiting from exploitation.

Investing in integration and social cohesion

Migration governance does not end at the border. States should also support:

- language education,
- recognition of qualifications,
- labor market access,
- anti-xenophobia campaigns,
- access to schools and healthcare,
- and local community support mechanisms.

Tackling root causes

Long-term migration governance must include:

1. conflict prevention,
2. peacebuilding,
3. poverty reduction,
4. climate adaptation,
5. anti-corruption efforts,
6. and support for livelihoods and public services in countries of origin.

VIII. How to prepare as a delegate

Delegates should begin by researching their own country's immigration and asylum policy. It is important to understand whether their state is primarily

- a country of origin,
- a transit state,
- a destination state,
- or a major refugee-hosting country.

Delegates should then ask:

- Does my country support multilateral migration governance or emphasize national sovereignty?
- Does my country rely economically on migrant labor?
- Is my country facing political pressure related to immigration?
- Has my country signed or supported the Global Compact for Migration?
- What is my country's position on refugee protection, border control, detention, returns, and family reunification?
- What kind of assistance or commitments would my country realistically support?

Delegates should also distinguish carefully between the following:

- migration policy,
- refugee protection,
- labor mobility,
- anti-trafficking measures,
- and integration policy.

When drafting resolutions, delegates should avoid vague statements and instead propose concrete mechanisms, such as:

- funding mechanisms,
- UN coordination platforms,
- reporting systems,

- regional pilot programs,
- technical assistance initiatives,
- or minimum standards for treatment and procedure.

As required by conference preparation standards, delegates should also prepare their position papers and draft resolutions on time and ensure that they can defend their country's policy line with evidence rather than general opinions.

All delegates are obligated to write at least one draft resolution and a minimum of two, preferably three, position papers so that all topics of the forum are fully covered. This requirement also needs to be included in your research report. Furthermore, remind your delegates that **the deadline to send in the documents is 27.08.2026**. And that after the deadline documents will not be corrected by you as student officers. By then all delegates should have sent in their documents. Documents turned in later than that should not be included in decision-making when it comes to **awards (as** for that, it is important to see how much work the individual delegates put into preparation).

IX. UN resolutions

UN General Assembly, New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (2016) – foundational declaration that launched the processes leading to the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Migration.

Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (2018)—the most important current UN framework on migration governance.

Global Compact for Migration | United Nations

Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and **1967 Protocol**
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990)
Palermo Protocols (2000) on trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants

X. Useful links

UN Global Compact for Migration overview

UN page on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

UNHCR – Asylum and migration

UNHCR – Migrant definition and legal distinction from refugees

IOM Migration Governance Insights 2025

IOM Mixed Migration Flows Overview

XI. Sources

https://www.un.org/en/migration2022/global-compact-for-migration

https://www.un.org/en/conf/migration/global-compact-for-safe-orderly-regular-migration.shtml

https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/asylum-and-migration

https://emergency.unhcr.org/protection/legal-framework/migrant-definition

https://publications.iom.int/books/migration-governance-insights-data-driven-perspectives-enhance-labour-migration-pathways

https://dtm.iom.int/report-product-series/mixed-migration-flows-yearly-overview

https://www.ohchr.org/en/topic/migration-and-human-rights

https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/lang--en/index.htm

https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/index.html

https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/migrant-smuggling/index.html