

Recommendations to the Belgian and Hungarian
Presidencies of the Council of the
European Union in 2024

January – December 2024

Executive summary

Under the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the final negotiations on the Pact on Migration and Asylum are expected to conclude, and legislative files to be formally adopted before the end of the EU's current legislative period in April 2024. In the second half of the year, the Hungarian Presidency will oversee the relevant migration files and legislation following the European Parliament elections and the appointment of a new Commission. Within this context, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) puts forward key recommendations to the Presidencies reflecting the spirit of cooperation that is needed to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration. IOM looks forward to the adoption of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, and invites the Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies to ensure that its adoption leads to more predictable, coordinated and humane response across all dimensions of migration and asylum. In this context it is critical to continue working on resolving conflicts, improving security, reinforcing human rights, providing sustained and reliable financial support to boost growth and resilience, and invest in people's future.

As EU labour markets face significant shifts owing to demographic and technological changes, it is essential to realize migrants' potential and harness the benefits of regular pathways for all parties. IOM encourages the Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies and EU Member States to continue working to drive legislative proposals that harness the potential of regular pathways and to ensure dialogue with partner countries and small and medium-sized enterprises.

The scale and severity of the climate crisis intersects with human mobility in all regions of the world, including in Europe. Worldwide, climate-related disasters are intensifying humanitarian crises, placing additional strain on an already overstretched and underfunded global humanitarian system. Climate and mobility increasingly affect peace and overlap with conflict and fragility. Slow onset changes in the climate and environment impact livelihoods and are driving people to migrate in search of better economic opportunities. IOM urges the Presidencies to deliver solutions that can i) offer choices for people to live safe, prosperous, and dignified lives in areas vulnerable to climate impacts, ii) provide assistance and protection to people displaced by disasters, and iii) help people to move safely and regularly to adapt to climate impacts.

The operationalization of EU policies to facilitate safe and dignified return and sustainable reintegration of migrants has made return management a dynamic and rapidly evolving area, including more – and more diverse – stakeholders. IOM calls on the Presidencies to foster a migrant-centered approach to return and reintegration counselling practices within the EU and with countries of origin as part of the migration continuum. IOM avails of its longstanding experience in return and reintegration, its global footprint and convening capacities to support Member States to strategically scale up return and reintegration, bringing new opportunities for innovative approaches, increased knowledge and expanded return and reintegration geographical coverage.

IOM looks forward to cooperating with both Presidencies during their terms and stands ready to offer its continued partnership, support and expertise.

I. Adopt the New Pact on Migration and Asylum

IOM looks forward to the adoption of the Pact on Migration and Asylum. We hope that its adoption and implementation will lead to more predictable, coordinated and humane response to all dimensions of migration and asylum. Implementation will be key and IOM stands ready to support the EU Member States for its rights-based operationalization.

IOM invites the Belgian and the Hungarian Presidencies to maintain high engagement in refugee resettlement. Resettlement remains an essential, life-saving mechanism and an invaluable durable solution for those most at risk.

IOM also invites the Presidencies to reinforce the implementation of relocation drawing on the lessons learnt from relocation operations thus far.

IOM encourages the incoming Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies to further develop partnerships with priority countries in Africa and Asia. The successful implementation of the Pact hinges on successful cooperation with countries of origin and transit and attention to all points along the routes.

The Presidencies should support an approach to migration as a tool to unlock human potential, to advance economic development in partner countries, and to do so by ensuring there are accessible regular pathways to connect people with opportunity.

The Global Gateway is a key vector for the future of EU development aid and relationships with third countries. It is also an opportunity to prioritise investment in people through education and skills development and its overall focus on youth. Investment in technical and vocational skills can facilitate access to decent jobs and entrepreneurship, and reduce unemployment, under-employment, and irregular migration.

The private sector can play a critical role in identifying skills needs, facilitating migrants' labour market integration, and ensuring the rights of migrant workers are respected. The private sector is increasingly committed to strengthening systems to manage the recruitment and employment of migrant workers. IOM believes this momentum can be strategically leveraged.

IOM encourages the Presidencies to support the protection of migrants in vulnerable situations, reduce irregular migration by expanding regular pathways, and tackle labour shortages by developing cross-regional labour mobility schemes to bridge the skills and manpower gaps in the domestic labour forces.

II. Unlock migrants' potential and harness the benefits of regular pathways for all

EU labour markets face significant shifts due to demographic and technological changes, and the transition towards greener, more resilient economies. These shifts are deepening structural skills shortages and imbalances and shaping new skills requirements. Better planned migration contributes to increasing **public confidence that migration is well-managed**, contributing to positive attitudes to migration more broadly.

IOM welcomes the continued effort of the European Commission and several EU Member States (EUMS) to facilitate regular migration, including through the EU Skills and Talent package, and the Skills and Talent Mobility package. IOM encourages the Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies and EUMS to continue working to drive legislative proposals, such as the Single Permit Directive and the legislative proposal for the EU Talent Pool, that promise to harness the potential of regular pathways. The pathways supported through these frameworks have the potential to expand and diversify

opportunities for safe, orderly and regular migration. These pathways could be pursued through innovative approaches based on multi-stakeholder cooperation, including networks and coalitions with public sector, private sector and civil society.

Similarly, it is important to review regular pathways that have already been setup to ensure that they effectively work in practice and increase their flexibility. This can involve improving accessibility, adapting criteria to new caseloads, as well as identifying models that work and scaling-up to harness the range of opportunities that they provide.

IOM strongly welcomes the European Commission Recommendation on the recognition of qualifications of third-country nationals (TCN), and its emphasis on removing barriers, strengthening cooperation with third countries and the “skills first approach”. Enhanced multi-stakeholder international cooperation and coordination is critical to improving skills identification, exchange of information and the transparency, quality, comparability, and portability of qualifications and skills. IOM also invites the EU Presidencies to emphasize the imperative of mutual sustainable development by addressing the common needs of both EUMS and partner countries’ labour markets and investing in skills development in countries of origin. This can also include actions to provide clear and accurate information, optimize visa processing and consider direct application support, facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and working conditions that provide for decent work.

IOM further invites the Presidencies to consider as well that providing opportunities for displaced talent holds the potential to address economic needs in destination countries and offer potentially long-term solutions for those in need of international protection.

In this context, IOM is keen to leverage its global presence to enhance dialogue with third countries, including in the framework of the EU Talent Partnerships. In parallel, IOM can support EUMS to strengthen attraction and retention, including by enhancing the linkages between pre-departure orientation and post-arrival support. IOM can facilitate the early assessment of skills, and TCN’s access to language, pre-employment orientation and other relevant training, and information provision. IOM is also ready to continue working in partnership with diasporas and new generations of citizens with a migration background to promote and facilitate mobility of youth between the EU and partner countries for learning and work experience.

Acknowledging the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the EU business landscape, IOM calls for the EU Presidencies to promote an enabling environment for SMEs to engage in international ethical recruitment, support the sustainable labour market integration of TCNs, and contribute to a just transition. IOM stands ready to support SMEs to promote the human and labour rights of migrant workers, identify and address the risks migrant workers face during their recruitment and migration, and foster more welcoming and diverse working environments. The former is likely to contribute to maximizing the potential of mobility, enhancing attraction and retention, and improving overall corporate sustainability due diligence in the EU. In this context, IOM welcomes the proposal for a Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence, and encourages the EU Presidencies to consider the importance of migration in supply chains in the EU and beyond.

Finally, regular pathways are key to **support integration, reintegration and social cohesion**, by creating opportunities for migrants, diasporas, communities and employers to take active steps for diversity management.

IOM also invites the EU and EUMS to further enhance the links between labour migration and integration, irrespective of the length of stay, and commit to support cross-sectoral and multi-level integration governance and coordination. Working in partnership with local authorities, civil society, including diasporas, and relevant stakeholders, IOM can further

contribute to the development and implementation of comprehensive integration strategies, which tackle structural discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and intolerance, and strengthen gender-, age- and diversity sensitive service provision.

III. Develop integrated solutions to climate mobility

The scale and severity of the climate crisis intersects with human mobility in every region of the world, including in Europe. Worldwide, climate-related disasters are intensifying humanitarian crises, placing additional strain on an already overstretched and underfunded global humanitarian system. Climate and mobility increasingly overlap with conflict and fragility. Slow onset changes in the environment impact livelihoods and are driving people to migrate in search of better economic opportunities.

There is an urgent need to deliver solutions that can i) offer choices for people to live safe, prosperous, and dignified lives in areas vulnerable to climate impacts, ii) provide assistance and protection to people displaced by disasters, and iii) help people to move safely and regularly to adapt to climate impacts.

In that respect, IOM welcomes the historic decision made at the 28th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28) to operationalize a new Loss and Damage Fund, including the pledges made by the EU and its Member States. The Fund represents a great step toward the acceleration of solutions related to climate mobility -- migration, displacement, and planned relocation – that can save lives and contribute to climate action. IOM stands ready to assist the EU Member States deliver solutions to address climate mobility.

Given the scope and urgency of the issues, we call on the Belgian and the Hungarian Presidencies to promote the development of ambitious at scale solutions, that:

1. **Promote the scaling up of climate change adaptation to enable empowered and informed decisions on human mobility by individuals, communities, and governments.**
 - **Prioritize prevention and risk reduction action (including anticipatory action), which enhances climate-friendly development, to offer people the choice to stay in their community of origin in dignity and safety** through early warning systems and early actions that reach everyone.
 - **Facilitate safe, orderly, and regular migration**, as appropriate and in accordance with national laws and policies and by enhancing opportunities for regular migration pathways in the context of climate change.
2. **Promoting the use of sustainable and predictable climate finance** to support adaptation in communities and people in climate vulnerable situations, including migrants and displaced persons. Enable stakeholders to engage with capital markets to supplement funding from private finance for addressing migration-related challenges and opportunities in the context of climate change.
3. **Promote the mainstreaming of Human Mobility – in all its forms – in the anticipated measures under the key policy areas of the European Green Deal.** Migration can play a role in preserving and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity, green renovation, clean and affordable energy, eliminating pollution, from farm to fork, a clean and circular economy, and sustainable and smart mobility.

4. **Engage with partner countries most vulnerable to climate impacts across the world** to address climate mobility, including through bilateral and multilateral dialogues to improve the governance of cross-border movements.
5. Promote a comprehensive response to address the impacts of **climate change on health**, including, for example, **mental health and psychosocial wellbeing**, loss of traditional medicinal knowledge, loss of livelihoods and culture, and **climate-induced displacement and migration**.

IV. Promote safe, dignified returns and sustainable reintegration

IOM recognizes the importance of EU policies in the field of migration and values its commitment to facilitate safe, dignified return and the sustainable reintegration of migrants. Effective return and reintegration schemes are key elements of comprehensive migration governance.

The operationalization of these policies has made return management a dynamic and rapidly evolving area, including more – and more diverse – stakeholders. This brings new opportunities for innovative approaches, increased knowledge and expanded geographical coverage of return and reintegration.

In this landscape, IOM avails of its longstanding experience in return and reintegration, its global footprint and convening capacities to support Member States to strategically scale up return and reintegration. To that end, IOM encourages the Belgian and the Hungarian Presidencies to:

1. **Foster dialogue and partnership with countries of origin** to promote co-responsibility and ownership of return and reintegration. The contribution of local, regional and national actors in countries of origin in designing return and reintegration policies and practices can lead to more sustainable outcomes for returnees and their communities, and to a greater sense of engagement. Enhanced and collaborative engagement with partner countries of origin can also contribute to the development and implementation of transnational referral mechanisms for return and reintegration. These mechanisms can ensure that returnees have greater access to needed assistance throughout the return continuum, as well as well defined, predictable coordination between all actors involved in return and reintegration.
2. **Foster a migrant-centered approach to return and reintegration counselling practices** within the EU and with partner countries of origin. This will allow migrants to make informed decisions while assessing return decision factors and reintegration prospects as well as identifying and addressing vulnerabilities. Initiating fora that bring together counsellors from EU Member States and counsellors in countries of origin to exchange on effective counselling practices can contribute to mutual learning and enhanced counselling outcomes for migrants. IOM's Return Counselling Toolkit and Reintegration Handbook remain available to further consolidate counselling practices and reinforce return and reintegration counselling networks.
3. **Enhance knowledge and evidence to inform strategies and programming in return and reintegration**. More robust knowledge on return and reintegration, including more systematic data collection, monitoring, evaluation and sharing of lessons learned can inform and thus strengthen evidence-based programming and future policies. Devoting more resources to enhance research and knowledge in the interest of sustainable reintegration can also inform on how best to strategically scale up engagement with the private sector, diaspora and migrants themselves as agents of change.



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