

After 18 months of negotiations since the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants at the UN 2016 General Assembly, more than 160 countries have gathered in Marrakech on the 10th of December to approve the Global Pact on Migration, which aims at making migration safer and more dignified.

Also known as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the Marrakech Pact covers migration in a comprehensive manner and reaffirms the values attached to the UN Charter and International Law, according to Louise Arbour, the UN's Special Representative for International Migration. With 258 million current migrants globally, the compact seeks to tackle the challenges that go with this growing phenomenon. It brings forward 23 objectives, including more accurate data collection and timely information on migratory waves, lower remittance fees and an increase in skills investments for migrants. The Marrakech Pact is said to forever change the way the international community manages human mobility, but it is highly unlikely that the compact will be effective in bringing about improvements for migrants and achieving its objectives.

Indeed, the compact is not binding. The list of objectives is reminiscent of many other UN non-binding legal bodies which sum up to empty promises. Not only being highly dependent on the goodwill of states implementing it, the compact is facing the problem of accommodating "interdependent guiding principles" that are rather contradictory: it recognises the importance of national sovereignty but still exhorts states to go out of their way to foster international cooperation and defend Human Rights, something which might not always be feasible.

Yet, the compact suggests capacity building measures that will help states in pursuing its objectives. One of those measures is the UN Migratory Network which aims to mobilise the full resources of world organisations such as the International Organisation for Migration and expertise for the accomplishment of objectives through an online global knowledge platform. A start-up fund is also set to be created to provide initial funding for project-oriented solutions. The Secretary General of the UN is tasked with reviewing the progress of the compact biannually while an International Migration Review Forum is set to be organised every four years.

Whilst the content and implementation of the compact might be illusory and not of general interest to investors, the global reception of the compact is of great importance. Indeed, migration is a key factor behind the recent rise in populism across European liberal democracies. Even centre left figures such as Matteo Renzi, Tony Blair and Hillary Clinton have called for a tougher European stance on

migration, as a way to stop rightwing populists. While for Clinton, the election of Trump and Brexit have chiefly been fuelled by the rise in migration during the last decade, Blair believes that no politician can now win elections without having a strong stance against immigration and that this stance reflects the legitimate grievances of a part of the population. Sovereignists and right-wing governments have indeed a lot to say about the Marrakech Pact, which they see as a dangerous door into a new legal understanding of migration, one creating a right to migration.

They oppose the UN's view that increasing migration is good for growth. Rather, they see migration as a centre part of globalisation, a process that has impoverished them and a biased political project aimed at fostering pluri-cultural societies. Many countries have therefore rejected the compact because it does not align with their current migration policies or allegedly jeopardises their security. Most notably, not making a clear distinction between legal and illegal migrants, especially in their right to access basic services, the compact has drawn much popular ire. Additionally, its objectives of eradicating discrimination, making detention a last resort policy and empowering migrants to realise full inclusion and social cohesion in their host countries are rather controversial among conservatives stressing the need to minimise immigration.

Back in late 2017, the US was the first country to disavow the compact by criticising its prioritisation of global governance over the sovereign right of states. Since then, Austria, Australia, the Czech Republic and Dominican Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Chile and Israel have followed suit. Bulgaria, Estonia, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland are other countries that are yet to decide whether to approve or reject the compact.

The UN Global Compact has therefore had a profound political impact, especially across Europe, so much that it might lead to the deposition of a government in Belgium and already led to the resignation of a minister. The latter, Miroslav Lajcak, was Slovakia's Foreign Minister who left office in November after learning that the Slovak Parliament rejected the Pact. In Belgium, the government of Prime Minister Charles Michel has been thrown into a minority government after that its pro-secession coalition party, the far-right New Flemish Alliance, quit the government for voting for the compact. Migration continues to be a hot topic in Europe, one that is likely to increase political instability.

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