

EMN AUSTRIA NATIONAL CONFERENCE REPORT 2025



**BUILDING ORDERLY
MIGRATION SYSTEMS
THROUGH INTERNATIONAL
COOPERATION AND
INNOVATION**

13 NOVEMBER 2025

VIENNA, AUSTRIA



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CONFERENCE BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES



Migration in 2025 continued to be shaped by humanitarian crises, geopolitical shifts, structural inequalities and changing global labour market needs. At the same time, financial resources were tightening while demand for safe, regular and skilled mobility pathways was growing, underlining the importance of effective international cooperation for orderly, humane and sustainable migration systems.

Against this backdrop, the EMN Austria National Conference 2025 focused on how international cooperation and innovation can strengthen migration governance. Discussions examined the role of international organizations, partnership-based approaches with third countries, including instruments to address irregular migration and displacement, including safe and supported return and reintegration, as well as skills mobility schemes in shaping future-oriented migration policies.

The conference aimed to explore how cooperation can support orderly migration, how innovative partnerships and mobility instruments can be further developed, and what conditions are necessary for fair, sustainable and ethical migration systems.

Organized by IOM Austria, acting as Austria's National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, in partnership with the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, the conference brought together representatives from governments, international organizations, academia and practice to exchange evidence, experiences and perspectives.

13.11.25

DATE

**HOTEL STEIGENBERGER
HERRENHOF,
VIENNA, AUSTRIA**

VENUE

100

PARTICIPANTS

THE PANELISTS

**DISCOVER COMPREHENSIVE BIOGRAPHIES OF ALL
MODERATORS AND PANELISTS HERE:**

[Click here](#)

OPENING REMARKS

MARIAN BENBOW PFISTERER

CHIEF OF MISSION

IOM COUNTRY OFFICE FOR AUSTRIA

PETER WEBINGER

DIRECTOR-GENERAL FOR MIGRATION AND INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS

AUSTRIAN FEDERAL MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR

OPENING REMARKS

KEY MESSAGES

Migration is shaped by humanitarian crises, geopolitical shifts, structural inequalities and evolving global labour market needs, at a time when financial resources are tightening and demand for safe and skilled mobility pathways is increasing. Effective international cooperation is indispensable for building orderly, humane and sustainable migration systems. Building such systems requires collaboration across governments, international organizations, civil society, the private sector and migrants themselves, in line with the IOM Strategic Plan 2024–2028.



MARIAN BENBOW PFISTERER

CHIEF OF MISSION, IOM COUNTRY
OFFICE FOR AUSTRIA

OPENING REMARKS

KEY MESSAGES

The speed of change and limited financial resources are major challenges of the current period. Migration is a complex and interconnected matrix in which everything is linked. In this context, countries should act as co-creators of innovative international concepts rather than merely reacting to developments. Cooperation and joining forces are essential for gaining greater strength and effectiveness in addressing migration-related challenges.



PETER WEBINGER

Director-General for Migration and
International Affairs,
Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior



PANEL I

NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY – THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN BUILDING RESILIENT MIGRATION SYSTEMS

The panel examined the role of international organizations in managing migration within shifting geopolitical and financial contexts. Discussions focused on strategies for enhancing cooperation with Member States, new approaches to collaboration, and ways of responding to emerging migration trends in order to promote more sustainable and orderly migration.

MODERATOR

JASON THEEDE

SENIOR REGIONAL LABOUR MOBILITY & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST, IOM

PANELISTS

PETER WEBINGER

DIRECTOR-GENERAL FOR MIGRATION
AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS,
AUSTRIAN FEDERAL MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR

AZZEDDINE FARHANE

AMBASSADOR OF MOROCCO TO AUSTRIA, EMBASSY OF
THE KINGDOM OF MOROCCO
IN AUSTRIA

ARTHUR ERKEN

REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR EUROPE AND CENTRAL
ASIA, IOM

PAUL STROMBERG

DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE REGIONAL BUREAU FOR
EUROPE, UNHCR

MARTIN TASCHNER

HEAD OF UNIT MIGRATION MANAGEMENT
PREPAREDNESS, DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR
MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS, EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Navigating Uncertainty – The Role of International Organizations in Building Resilient Migration Systems

KEY MESSAGES

The current protection system originates from a pre-globalized era and is no longer fully adequate in today's globalized context. Europe cannot sustainably manage large numbers of asylum-seekers only once they reach EU territory, which underscores the need to focus more strongly on situations in regions of origin. A longer-term vision of “zero deaths in the Mediterranean” was highlighted, alongside the need for a common vision, shared goals, and joint initiatives to address uncertainty in migration. Irrespective of migration fluctuations, ensuring the integration of people with a migration background and limited German language skills remains a relevant challenge in Austria.



PETER WEBINGER

Director-General for Migration and
International Affairs,
Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior



Navigating Uncertainty – The Role of International Organizations in Building Resilient Migration Systems

KEY MESSAGES

Morocco's approach to migration is guided by shared responsibility between countries of origin, transit, and destination, as well as respect for human rights and a strong link between migration and sustainable development. Morocco played an active role in the Global Compact for Migration in 2018, contributing to international dialogue. Migration is considered a source of prosperity and wealth, while irregular migration remains a key concern. Reliable data and regional ownership, including regionally hosted observatories and data hubs, are seen as essential for effective migration governance.



AZZEDDINE FARHANE

Ambassador of Morocco to Austria, Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco in Austria

Navigating Uncertainty – The Role of International Organizations in Building Resilient Migration Systems

KEY MESSAGES

Approximately 90 per cent of migration to Europe is regular, while around 10 per cent is irregular, yet the latter receives disproportionate public attention. A fact-based and balanced narrative on migration is therefore crucial. Migrants contribute significantly to societies and economies across the continent and are integral to ensuring a dynamic Europe. Good migration governance facilitates safe and regular pathways, and at the same time, requires an effective and humane returns and reintegration mechanism including for those who have no legal right to stay. The current context of geopolitical realignment demands strong international cooperation, sustained financing, and reinforced trust in multilateral systems to ensure migration related challenges are addressed comprehensively.



ARTHUR ERKEN

Regional Director for Europe
and Central Asia, IOM



Navigating Uncertainty – The Role of International Organizations in Building Resilient Migration Systems

KEY MESSAGES

Current challenges do not necessarily indicate that asylum systems are broken, but rather that they can be overwhelmed or misused. The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum contains new tools that could strengthen system efficiency. A route-based approach, looking at entire displacement journeys before multiple border crossings occur, is essential. Evidence suggests that many people would be willing to remain in host countries if granted legal status, the right to work, or family reunification. Greater responsibility-sharing between high-, middle-, and low-income countries is therefore needed.



PAUL STROMBERG
Deputy Director of the Regional
Bureau for Europe,
UNHCR



Navigating Uncertainty – The Role of International Organizations in Building Resilient Migration Systems

KEY MESSAGES

Migration governance must remain dynamic and capable of adaptation. The right to seek asylum is enshrined in national constitutions and EU law and must be defended, while irregular migration involving smuggling and trafficking should not be accepted. Reliable facts and figures are central to understanding migration dynamics. Recent data show a decrease in irregular border crossings and asylum applications, linked in part to cooperation with third countries. Cooperation between the EU, international organizations, and partner countries should be strategic rather than transactional, with the EU maintaining its role as a stable donor.



MARTIN TASCHNER

Head of Unit Migration Management
Preparedness, Directorate-General for
Migration and Home Affairs,
European Commission

Navigating Uncertainty – The Role of International Organizations in Building Resilient Migration Systems

Q&A SUMMARY

The discussion highlighted that emerging migration dynamics were shaped by fluctuating numbers, shifting geopolitical contexts and growing political polarization within EU Member States. Participants emphasized the need for common visions, stronger bilateral cooperation and evidence-based policymaking to maintain trust in democratic systems. The importance of route-based approaches, responsibility-sharing across countries, and strategic cooperation with third countries and international organizations was underlined, alongside the role of reliable data and forecasting tools. Several interventions stressed the need for safer spaces for dialogue, greater inclusion of diverse perspectives — including those of refugees and migrants — and closer engagement between policymakers and researchers to bridge gaps between public perception and empirical evidence.



PANEL II

INNOVATING THE EXTERNAL DIMENSION – TOWARDS A HOLISTIC APPROACH

The panel examined holistic, partnership-based approaches to migration management. Discussions focused on how regular migration pathways can be linked with early information provision along migration routes, development cooperation, and innovative instruments.

MODERATOR

JASON THEEDE

SENIOR REGIONAL LABOUR MOBILITY & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST, IOM

PANELISTS

BERND BRÜNNER

MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE AUSTRIAN
DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (ADA)

DEAN JORGENSEN

MIGRATION PROGRAM MANAGER,
EMBASSY OF CANADA TO AUSTRIA

FRANZISKA KANDOLF

DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR MIGRATION
AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, AUSTRIAN
FEDERAL MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR

NICOLA GRAVIANO

DEPUTY DIRECTOR MIGRATION DIALOGUES &
COOPERATION, ICMPD (FILLING IN FOR SEDEF DEARING)

Innovating the External Dimension – Towards a Holistic Approach

KEY MESSAGES

Addressing the root causes of migration is a central task of development cooperation. Austria's development cooperation focuses on three main areas: poverty reduction, peace and security, and environmental sustainability, all of which are closely linked to migration dynamics. ADA supports projects in around 70 countries worldwide, including initiatives implemented by international organizations in migration-affected regions.



Bernd Brünner

Managing Director of the Austrian
Development Agency (ADA)

Innovating the External Dimension – Towards a Holistic Approach

KEY MESSAGES

The global context is increasingly challenging due to conflicts and financial tensions. Broad and mutually beneficial partnerships with third countries remain a key component of Austrian migration policy in order to address irregular migration and related challenges already in regions of origin. Migration, integration, healthcare, and education systems in Austria and the EU are under growing pressure, which creates a need for innovative solutions and new instruments. This includes in particular exploring the implementation of return hubs and the safe third country concept.



Franziska Kandolf

Deputy Director General for Migration and
International Affairs, Austrian Federal Ministry
of the Interior

Innovating the External Dimension – Towards a Holistic Approach

KEY MESSAGES

Partnerships remain central to effective migration governance, alongside efforts to strengthen partner countries' own migration systems. Policies need to be adaptable to national contexts and sufficiently flexible to respond to changing circumstances. A holistic, whole-of-route approach is necessary to ensure equitable responsibility-sharing.



Dean Jorgensen

Migration Program Manager,
Embassy of Canada to Austria



Innovating the External Dimension – Towards a Holistic Approach

KEY MESSAGES

The traditional categories of countries of origin, transit, and destination are increasingly blurred, making cooperation more important than ever. Bringing all relevant actors together and maintaining dialogue is essential. Migrant Resource Centres have reached millions of people through face-to-face counselling and media campaigns and also provide valuable data on migration trends, supporting evidence-based policymaking.



Nicola Graviano

Deputy Director Migration
Dialogues & Cooperation, ICMPD

Innovating the External Dimension – Towards a Holistic Approach

Q&A SUMMARY

The exchange focused on how coherent migration systems could be built along entire migration routes through flexible, holistic and whole-of-route approaches grounded in trust, partnership and capacity-building. Participants discussed the role of return hubs and safe third countries within broader route-based frameworks, as well as the growing importance of Migrant Resource Centres in providing information, countering trafficking and generating data for evidence-based policies. Development cooperation was framed as central to improving livelihoods in countries of origin, with emphasis on needs-based engagement, addressing root causes of migration and aligning support with national priorities in partner countries.



PANEL III

SHAPING PATHWAYS – SKILLS, MOBILITY AND MIGRATION PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION

The panel explored how the expansion of regular migration pathways can foster effective cooperation with third countries. Panellists discussed programmes and partnerships that facilitate close coordination between countries of origin and destination, like Skills Mobility and Talent Partnerships, highlighting practical examples and examining key success factors for fair, demand-driven, and sustainable migration cooperation.

MODERATOR

JASON THEEDE

SENIOR REGIONAL LABOUR MOBILITY & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST, IOM

PANELISTS

THOMAS DOBLHOFF

SENIOR EAGLE PROJECT COORDINATOR AT THE COORDINATION OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, DIRECTORATE – GENERAL FOR INTEGRATION, OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS AND ETHNIC GROUPS, AUSTRIAN FEDERAL CHANCELLERY

INGRID NORMAND

DIRECTOR OF THE FRENCH OFFICE FOR IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION (OFII) DELEGATION IN TUNISIA

RABEB BEN KHALIFA

SENIOR EMPLOYMENT ADVISER AT THE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION UNIT, NATIONAL AGENCY FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SELF-EMPLOYMENT, TUNISIA

MICHAEL SAUER

VICE DEAN OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL SECURITY STUDIES/PROFESSOR FOR SOCIAL POLICY, HOCHSCHULE BONN-RHEIN-SIEG

Shaping Pathways – Skills, Mobility and Migration Partnerships in Action

KEY MESSAGES

The EAGLE project, implemented with IOM Austria and Egypt and funded by the EU through the Migration Partnership Facility, follows a dual-track approach combining vocational training in Egypt with employment opportunities in Egypt or Austria. Alignment of curricula with Austrian TVET standards and Red-White-Red Card procedures is essential, as is the involvement of all relevant stakeholders to ensure smooth processing of applications. The project seeks to create lasting impact by investing in Egypt's training system, including through a trainer-of-trainers model.



Thomas Doblhoff

Senior EAGLE Project Coordinator at the
Coordination of International Affairs, Directorate –
General for Integration, Office of Religious Affairs
and Ethnic Groups, Austrian Federal Chancellery

Shaping Pathways – Skills, Mobility and Migration Partnerships in Action

KEY MESSAGES

OFII aims to expand circular migration, including through the THAMM programme in Tunisia. Seasonal migration schemes allow individuals to work in EU countries for around six months before returning, contributing to skills transfer and employment opportunities in Tunisia. The quality of employment, transparency in recruitment (including visa procedures and costs), and adequate support for workers—such as accommodation, language training, and equal treatment—are considered essential for sustainable migration partnerships.



Ingrid Normand

Director of the French Office for
Immigration and Integration (OFII)
delegation in Tunisia

Shaping Pathways – Skills, Mobility and Migration Partnerships in Action

KEY MESSAGES

The focus is on mutually beneficial labour mobility partnerships centred on employment, with strong adherence to fair and ethical recruitment and labour standards. Formal conventions are seen as important tools to define roles, responsibilities, recruitment standards, and social protection provisions. Tunisia maintains active labour mobility projects with several European countries, and effective alignment of labour market needs between origin and destination countries is considered crucial.



Rabeb Ben Khalifa

Senior Employment Adviser at the
International Cooperation Unit, National
Agency for Employment and Self-
Employment, Tunisia

Shaping Pathways – Skills, Mobility and Migration Partnerships in Action

KEY MESSAGES

Discussions on skills mobility often concentrate on quantitative outcomes such as vacancies or arrivals, but social and institutional impacts are equally important. Effective partnerships require policy coherence across ministries, government levels, and borders, as well as a transparent distribution of costs and benefits. The Germany–Vietnam Global Skills Partnership illustrates how investments in local training systems and industry standards can create broader, lasting impact, while short, donor-driven projects often struggle to achieve sustainability. Strong local alliances, including municipal involvement, are therefore essential.



Michael Sauer

Vice Dean of the Department of Social Policy and Social Security Studies/Professor for Social Policy, Hochschule Bonn-Rhein-Sieg

Shaping Pathways – Skills, Mobility and Migration Partnerships in Action

Q&A SUMMARY

Discussions centred on aligning labour market needs between countries of origin and destination through tailored training, bilateral agreements and circular migration schemes. Fair and sustainable mobility partnerships were linked to transparent distribution of costs and benefits, ethical recruitment, strong conventions, and trusted third parties in recruitment processes. Capacity development in countries of origin, local anchoring and municipal involvement were identified as essential for long-term sustainability, alongside stronger monitoring and evidence systems. Participants also reflected on challenges related to racism faced by migrants, SME participation in partnerships, differing job profiles across countries, and balancing demographic decline in origin countries with outward mobility — highlighting the need for inclusive communication, integration support and continuous dialogue between partners.



FINAL REMARKS

Bettina Baumgartner

Deputy Director for EU and International
Migration, Austrian Federal Ministry of the
Interior

Saskia

Heilemann

Head of the Policy Research and Migration Law
Unit, IOM Country Office for Austria (EMN
Austria National Coordinator)

FINAL REMARKS

KEY MESSAGES

Migration remains a priority issue at both EU and national levels, and responding to changing environments and new realities requires strong partnerships and cooperation to build sustainable migration systems. The role of trust, common visions and shared needs was highlighted throughout the conference as particularly important in complex situations, alongside the value of recognizing and communicating success stories and the progress that had already been achieved.



Bettina Baumgartner

Deputy Director for EU and
International Migration, Austrian
Federal Ministry of the Interior

FINAL REMARKS

KEY MESSAGES

International collaboration was presented as a practical and essential tool for shaping future-oriented migration policies. The importance of bringing together research, data and evidence with policy and practice was underlined to ensure well-informed decisions, reflecting the EMN's mission to provide reliable, comparable information on migration and to foster exchange and mutual learning.



Saskia Heilemann

Head of the Policy Research and
Migration Law Unit, IOM Country Office
for Austria (EMN Austria National
Coordinator)

THANK YOU!

If you have any questions,
please do not hesitate to contact us.



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www.emn.at



The European Migration Network (EMN) is coordinated by the European Commission with National Contact Points established in each EU Member State (except Denmark) plus in EMN Observer Countries including Norway, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Montenegro, Armenia, Serbia, North Macedonia and Albania. The National Contact Point Austria is financed by the European Commission and the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior.