

**First Regional Review of the Global Compact for Safe,
Orderly and Regular Migration in the UNECE region**

Friday, 13 November 2020, 10:00 – 15:40

**Closing remarks from Mr. Stéphane Jaquemet, Director of Policy,
International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)**



Many thanks for inviting me. It is a great honor to be on this panel, along with the Portuguese Secretary of State, the Canadian Immigration Minister, my colleague Marta, from the UN Major Group on Children and Youth, and indeed Jonathan, our moderator.

Since it is our final session, it is time to come up with takeaways, very concrete ones, based on the reality on the ground and what can realistically be achieved within the coming year.

I have chosen three takeaways. Three absolute priorities, given all the destructions (lives, livelihoods, jobs, hopes) and human tragedies brought by the COVID-19 crisis. All three priorities predate this, but have been made even more compelling by the pandemic.

The first priority is access to services. Migrants, regardless of their status - and I insist, **regardless of their status** - should have access to services; in particular health services – and I don't need to explain why; education - it is extremely cruel at this very depressing moment to deprive migrant children from schooling; and social services, in particular all the network support helping migrants to navigate the bureaucratic steps in the country where they reside. As importantly, migrants must know they will not be arrested or deported if they go to hospital, attend school, or activate social protection mechanisms. The so-called firewalls, an expression many governments are uneasy with, are not so complicated to implement and must not be a taboo, since they ensure basic human dignity; they restore the trust between migrants and the authorities, something essential if we want migrants to cooperate with the authorities, a must in terms of security; and the firewalls are just basic solidarity at a time when solidarity is the definer of a caring and resilient society.

The second priority is creating and expanding regular pathways. We should never lose sight of the fact that the Global Compact, in its very title, is about “safe, orderly and **regular**” migration. How can we then do justice to the title, if regular pathways are not genuinely created and promoted, and the vast majority of would-be migrants cannot access them? It is also important to keep in mind that the Global Compact negotiations were launched by the September 2016 UN New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which was itself, to a very large extent, the product of the 2015 situation in Europe. The latter saw the arrival of more than 1 million refugees and migrants, an emergency partly provoked by the lack of

regular pathways, already a reality at that time. If we take the various migration packages in the UNECE region, whether at sub-regional or national levels, we see that UN member states most of the time do refer to many different areas - migrant rights, access to asylum, border management, returns, international cooperation, financial support to countries of origin, etc. - everything except regular pathways. We must move on! The pandemic has created massive unemployment and it may not be the best of times to create opportunities, when so much just needs to be repaired. At the same time, we will only get out of economic recession through bold moves, massive financial investments, but also investing in migrant workers, and genuinely involving trade unions, employers and local authorities. Regular pathways are about work permits and visas, but it is broader. It is education. It is also making sure families are not separated or are quickly reunited.

My third and final point is about detention. It could have been border management, decent work, or returns. I have chosen detention because of its importance but also because it is the one issue where we have seen many positive government initiatives in the past months, aiming at either releasing detained migrants - often in relatively large numbers - or not detaining them. We have now a solid body of best practices, many pre-dating the pandemic, others as a principled response to the health crisis. On these fully tested best practices, we can build an environment where alternatives to detention systematically prevail. Alternatives to immigration detention work, as amply demonstrated by recent pilot projects, which involve a multi-stakeholder approach, and in countries that do not resort - or only exceptionally - to immigration detention. Let's invest in them, while not forgetting that child detention is never an option. It is against international standards. It is unacceptable and unjustifiable. Such a stance is legal, ethical, common sense and in everyone's interest. Nevertheless, child detention continues and, as my colleague Michele Levoy mentioned during the opening session, it may even receive a new impetus with the new EU Pact on Migration, which is totally wrong.

Thank you!