



IMRF 2022

ASSESSMENT PAPER



Civil
Society
Action
Committee

May 2023

SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS

Civil society commitments to overcoming barriers to effective engagement:

- 01** We will insist on a standard mechanism of communication with civil society and other stakeholders, to keep us fully informed and in a timely manner, on both procedural and substantive issues concerning the RMRFs and next IMRF.
- 02** We will also insist on clear and transparent criteria for the selection processes in which stakeholders are chosen to participate and speak on various segments of the RMRFs and IMRF. In addition, these selection processes have to be defined with the participation of civil society and other stakeholders themselves.
- 03** The AC secretariat will reinforce effective and timely exchange of information in relation to the exchanges with the UN and UN Member States, encouraging all civil society members to use this space for cohesive and unified engagement and participation both for the preparatory process and during the forums.
- 04** We will request that the event organizers coordinate with host countries of the events, to support civil society and other stakeholders – particularly from developing countries – to obtain visas which determine their attendance.
- 05** We will insist that the financing window and resources are transparently communicated with early preparation and notification. Early planning for attendance can be made easier by the UN and also less costly for civil society. This should by no means however, dictate the arbitration of participation in the programme.



- 06** We will only accept success that refers to the GCM itself in light of its impact on the ground. We will advocate for direct references to the full GCM in any review fora and will reject attempts to water it down through less ambitious outcome documents.
- 07** We will target Member States in our advocacy and develop a joint strategy to track progress. This should include a plan for joint advocacy at the local, national, regional and sub-regional levels in the lead-up to the RMRFs and prior to future IMRFs.
- 08** Build on existing synergies with cities and strive to create new ones to strengthen joint advocacy from the bottom up to obtain action from Member States.
- 09** Advocate for civil-society self-organizing with the UN and Member States at all levels. Collectively reject the role played by the UN in deciding who speaks and in what segment of the IMRF, especially when we are asked to speak on behalf of groups that we do not represent or are not a member of.
- 10** Our advocacy strategy towards future IMRFs and RMRFs must be a ground-up strategy that truly reflects priorities on the ground. And to accomplish that, grassroots, local and national civil society organizations' participation in the RMRFs is key and should thus be advocated for whenever possible.
- 11** We will support the prompt set-up of the monitoring working group indicated in the UN Network on Migration's annual work plan, with a requirement that civil society participation is mandatory and welcomed.

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INTRODUCTION

The first International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) took place in New York in May 2022 to evaluate progress in the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). Starting in June 2021, the Action Committee (AC) membership, together with partners and allies, developed a collective process for civil society engagement towards and during this key event. Throughout the preparatory activities and during the Forum, we mobilized our membership and partners to provide a collective space and voice for all interested civil society. Despite our many efforts to engage with the UN and Member States, the 2022 IMRF process brought bitter disappointment to many of us. For this reason, it was decided to develop the below document after the Forum took place in order to collectively evaluate our participation in the IMRF, and the many challenges encountered when trying to engage with the official process. Based on these reflections, we identified the emerging collective lessons from the process, including some that are shared with the wider non-state actors.

This document thus lays out the AC's key collective takeaways from the lead-up to, and the 2022 IMRF. This assessment paper also unpacks barriers to civil society engagement related to **(1)** logistics and inadequate access to information, **(2)** fragmented and scarce avenues for multi-stakeholder interaction, **(3)** lack of funding and visa support and **(4)** weakened Progress Declaration and delayed attention to indicators. The AC membership in the final part of this paper outlines global civil society commitments to overcoming these challenges in future evaluation efforts regarding the implementation of the GCM, with specific reference to action and advocacy points towards Member States, international organizations and other stakeholders.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISING

Before and During the IMRF

1. COLLABORATION AND JOINT PREPARATION WITHIN THE AC AND ITS ALLIES

Starting in the second half of 2021, the Action Committee membership came together to develop an ambitious strategy towards the IMRF. The space offered by the AC allowed the development of a solid strategy with clear priorities consolidated in a joint position commonly referred to as the “12 Key Ways”. This document provided the basis of global civil society engagement in the IMRF, as it laid out both thematic priorities as well as practical modalities for successful civil society engagement and migrant agency and voice. Throughout the IMRF preparatory process and the Forum itself, the 12 Key Ways thus allowed for cohesive messaging and demands across our selected representatives. This also enabled AC members and partners to provide strategic, cohesive input during the negotiations of the Progress Declaration, and to influence, to a limited extent, some of its final content.

KEY PRIORITIES

- 01 Pandemic Recovery
- 02 Climate Change
- 03 Race, Xenophobia, Gender, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity ...
- 04 Migrant Workers' Rights
- 05 Regular Pathways and Regularization
- 06 Protection at Borders
- 07 Detention
- 08 Deportation/Return
- 09 Children in Migration
- 10 Access to Services
- 11 Migrants Agency and Voice
- 12 Civil Society Engagement

Further, this collective organizing under the AC umbrella gave our demands the critical weight needed to influence the IMRF preparatory process. Initiatives such as the collectively endorsed Open Letter to the President of the General Assembly, sent by the AC on 15 March 2022 to denounce the shrinking space for civil society at the UN, are telling examples of our collective impact. Indeed, our open letter resulted in increased access to the IMRF preparatory process, which was largely due to the AC membership’s persistent joint efforts.

Beyond the impact on the IMRF preparations themselves, a secondary side-effect of these activities and the mutual challenges faced is fostered efforts within the AC platform to communicate regularly and share information, particularly on evolving avenues and methods of engagement and representation, which allowed for more cohesive strategising.

2. STRONG, COHESIVE AND ENERGIZING PREPARATORY SPACES

The People’s Migration Challenge (PMC) initiative, co-organized by some of the AC members, created an additional opportunity to freely exchange and a key space for migrants and grassroots organizations to critically review the GCM and its implementation, in frank and open dialogues that challenged the official States’ discourse in the months leading to the IMRF. Additionally, it brought to the global surface how the GCM is viewed in light of real progress on the ground, as witnessed directly by migrants and grassroots organizations. The run-up discussions and engagement through AC and PMC platforms had the added effect of providing a unifying and supportive spaces



for AC members and representatives. During the IMRF, the space offered by the PMC (see details below) was instrumental in synergising efforts of both those present in New York, as well as for those who could

not attend due to a range of barriers. The PMC preparatory sessions were also a key opportunity to discuss shared perspectives and priorities with local authorities, thus strengthening our relationship with city leaders.

The PMC held in parallel to the Forum, with its open and flexible format, gave participants - including those who could not or did not want to attend the IMRF - a safe space where all could speak their minds freely and were encouraged to discuss needs to achieve real change. The result was a strong civil society presence in New York, in self-mobilized hybrid parallel events and an inclusive space appreciated by various actors who could engage in the thematic sessions and IMRF debriefs while feeling part of the IMRF space. This was particularly important since the webTV channel for the IMRF did not provide for virtual interaction.

On 15 May, the day before the IMRF Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue, which preceded the IMRF itself, the Action Committee organized a Civil Society Preparatory Day (CSPD). Together with the multiple PMC sessions, both running prior to and in parallel with the IMRF throughout the week, these initiatives provided fundamental spaces for civil society exchange and strategising. The CSPD and preparatory PMCs helped inform participants and build coherent preparations for the week, inspiring civil society representatives, whether online or in-person, and provided key messaging and examples that were used by civil society delegates at the Forum.



These efforts and joint spaces allowed those who took the floor during the pre-IMRF multistakeholder hearing and in the Forum itself to present strong, coherent messages that reflected the joint views of many of those engaged in the preparatory processes. Selected representatives speaking at various Forum sessions, such as those from the youth delegation, also reported that these sessions provided valuable refinement of messages and examples that they then included in their interventions.

All these efforts provided a solid basis for **Elana Wong's and Colin Rajah's interventions in the Forum's opening session**. These two critical speeches reflected our joint discussions and conveyed the concerns around inaccessibility and additional barriers to participation faced.

3. DIRECT ENGAGEMENT BY (SOME) MEMBER STATES AND CO-FACILITATORS OF THE PROGRESS DECLARATION

Despite the many challenges faced during the IMRF process, AC members were able to open constructive channels of dialogue and substantive communication with some member states, notably the GCM Champion Countries alongside the Friends of Migration group of States, as well as the co-facilitators of the Progress Declaration. Through self-organized initiatives, AC members were also able to engage with individual Member States through attendance at parallel events in New York, particularly through side events and bilateral meetings.

IMRF PREPARATIONS & PROCESS

Key Challenges to Effective Civil Society Participation

Despite these collective efforts and achievements resulting from our self-organizing, the IMRF itself led us to witness a severe regression in access for civil society and migrants themselves in the entire process - a regression we repeatedly denounced and condemned. Whilst the pre-GCM consultations and negotiations phases provided civil society with far more opportunities to contribute and engage, the space accorded to us around the 2022 IMRF was a pale replica of what we experienced in the 2017-2018 period. In particular, the following broad issues were all clear regressions compared to earlier years.

Logistics and inadequate access to information

- a. Lack of access to the Secretary General's Report presentation and following discussions on terms similar to those provided to governments.
- b. Lack of access to the Progress Declaration negotiations: Civil society was not allowed to observe informal consultations, which meant that the negotiations of difficult paragraphs of the Progress Declaration happened behind closed doors. Other negotiations for the Progress Declaration were conducted in-person at UNHQ in New York, restricting civil society to observers watching from the balcony.
- c. Lack of clear and transparent criteria to attend and intervene in the IMRF, and a lack of openness by the UN in how they designated who from civil society was to take the floor and in which segment.

- d. 'Profile requests' and criteria for speaker selection were opaque and at best implied to very selected and scattered members of the AC. The UN approached AC members directly, and there was a heavy implication (especially to those able to access further information on the Roundtable speaker selection processes), that speakers were being chosen as a 'tick box' exercise of compounded 'vulnerabilities' for diversity quotas. Various civil society representatives chosen were also approached directly, and given very short deadlines to confirm their participation.
- e. Numerous logistical challenges hindered representative and cohesive civil society engagement in the process, such as the lack of timely information and support with registration, funding, visas, speaking slots, etc. This also seems to have impacted some Member States' participation, especially some African states representatives, who were not able to obtain their visas on time to attend the IMRF.
- f. Last minute, opaque and scattered communication on deadlines and meeting/session timelines.
- g. The aforementioned lack of timely information affected participation and engagement from grassroots members, including youth. Despite repeated appeals to the UN organizers, the entire process and lead-up to the Forum was fraught with last-minute deadlines and information, including 12 - 24 hour deadlines on proposing speaking representatives or submitting further information for support, which can be very intimidating for most civil society groups.

Fragmented and scarce avenues for multi-stakeholder interaction

- a. The fragmented and limited civil society participation and self-organizing in the IMRF minimized our advocacy impact and led to a national government-dominated process and outcomes. With this in mind, we need to be mindful of our roles in legitimizing the process and therefore insist on real, meaningful engagement in the IMRF process and its Progress Declaration.
- b. Many restrictions in accessing governments in the UNHQ building and meeting spaces themselves: We also deplored the limited opportunities for direct engagement between civil society and UN Member States – in particular during the pre-IMRF multi-stakeholder hearing, to which governments were invited but showed limited attendance – but also throughout the preparatory process and regular listening sessions. This was compounded by a lack of access for civil society to the floor where states’ delegations were seated, and restricted meeting and side spaces at the UN Headquarters, which effectively separated ‘stakeholders’ and ‘states’. This prevented an honest dialogue between stakeholders and governments, making it difficult for the former to give their inputs directly to the national governments responsible for GCM implementation, and creating obstacles for the latter to hear the perspectives of a broader, representative and diverse group of stakeholders and migrants themselves.

Lack of funding and visa support

- a.* The significant lack of support for visa facilitation for those attending from the Global South. This was a clear sign that the diversity of civil society representation was not considered critical for the IMRF and by design, exclusive to those that had US visas or easier access to US territory. It is common knowledge that various embassies, particularly the US, have long waiting periods for visa appointments due to COVID-19 backlogs. New applicants for April 2022 were invited for appointments as far as December 2022 and even up to 2024 dates. Any fast-track request required internal collaboration between US embassies and the inviting organization. The invitation letter for panellists (to be used in visa application) did not help as it stated very clearly that the office of the President of the GA would not be facilitating this process. As noted by a civil society speaker at the multi-stakeholder forum, obtaining a US visa to attend the IMRF in New York for a Global South passport holder was “an act of miracles”.
- b.* The narrow funding for civil society participants (with no targeting for Global South participants) coupled with late notification and unrealistic support for those funded through the UN. While most ticket costs were fully covered by the UN, the reimbursement costs did not come close to covering the exorbitant hotel costs (let alone minimal daily meals and transport) in New York, even for hotel options further away from the city. This meant that civil society representatives had to co-finance a significant part of the actual costs of travelling to New York and staying for a week of meetings. It did not help that confirmations for funding were made only two weeks before the IMRF, amid known religious holidays commemorated in a number of countries.

DIMINISHED 'WHOLE OF SOCIETY' PARTICIPATION

In addition to the above challenges faced by civil society, we also deplored the lack of official modalities for Mayors and local authorities to participate directly in the IMRF. Such obstacles to their participation went against the GCM's whole-of-society principle and weakened the quality of the IMRF itself.

WEAKENED PROGRESS DECLARATION AND DELAYED ATTENTION TO INDICATORS

Finally, although the adoption of the Progress Declaration by consensus (i.e. without a vote) can be considered as a certain achievement, the decision to opt for adoption by consensus reflects the lack of ambition of the document. To us, the Progress Declaration should by no means represent a measure of success for the 2022 IMRF, let alone for the GCM itself, especially in light of the developments on the ground that objectively reflect a deteriorating and more dangerous environment for migrants every day and worldwide. IOM itself has recorded that in 2022 the number of missing migrants reached 50,000.

Instead, we ask that the only criterion to assess the implementation of the GCM be the progress of migrants and communities on the ground. At present, there is no agreed monitoring mechanism (i.e. robust framework and process) on the GCM, which makes measurement of success by Member States challenging to rely on and allows for self-monitoring exercises that are not participatory.

CIVIL SOCIETY COMMITMENTS

& Action Points

In light of the above, and looking at the upcoming 2024 Regional Migration Review Forums (RMRFs) and 2026 IMRF, the Action Committee, as a global civil society platform, proposes commitments and action points to focus on its advocacy to tackle the above-outlined barriers hindering effective civil society engagement:

The communication flow on the “run-up to” schedule for 2024 RMRFs and 2026 IMRF is a crucial element for the preparation for all stakeholders, particularly for civil society who often have to self-mobilize and finance their participation.

1. Commitment: We will insist on a standard mechanism of communication with civil society and other stakeholders, to keep us fully informed and in a timely manner, on both procedural and substantive issues concerning the RMRFs and next IMRF, including a request for early communication of the dates of preparatory meetings. This is to ensure our adequate preparation to fully engage and participate in these forums.

2. Commitment: We will also insist on clear and transparent criteria for the selection processes in which stakeholders are chosen to participate and speak on various segments of the RMRFs and IMRF. In addition, these selection processes have to be defined with the participation of civil society and other stakeholders themselves. This is an indispensable aspect of the process, in respect of the principles of a “self-organized” civil society and other stakeholders, and a truly “whole-of-society” approach. In addition, this would favour a more substantive and effective participation of a diverse group of stakeholders.

3. Commitment: The AC secretariat will reinforce effective and timely exchange of information in relation to the exchanges with the UN and UN Member States, encouraging all civil society members to use this space for cohesive and unified engagement and participation both for the preparatory process and during the forums. This is fundamental to avoid our fragmentation, limitations and intimidation that can be the result from the overwhelming process.

The participation of civil society in any events held in New York and Geneva should take into account the need for support. Beyond financial support for logistical arrangements, civil society representatives invited to panels need timely visa facilitation and in most cases, fast-track access, in their respective countries to ensure they can obtain the required visa on time.

4. Commitment: We will request that the event organizers coordinate with the host countries of the events, to support civil society and other stakeholders – particularly from developing countries – to obtain visas which determine their attendance.



The financial support for civil society to attend the IMRF and other related events is a welcome move but should also recognize the diversity of actors, the financing needs, and fit with the real costs of attendance.

5. Commitment: We will insist that the financing window and resources are transparently communicated with early preparation and notification. The AC can be an instrumental channel to communicate these to the wider civil society community. Early planning for attendance can be made easier by the UN and also less costly for civil society. This should by no means however, dictate the arbitration of participation in the programme.

The GCM objectives are, and must remain, the only measure of success of its own implementation as well as that of any progress in global migration governance.

No review processes or related outcome documents can claim to replace that.

6. Commitment: We will only accept success that refers to the GCM itself in light of its impact on the ground. We will advocate for direct references to the full GCM in any review fora and will reject attempts to water it down through less ambitious outcome documents.

Direct exchanges with governments are decisive.

Given the limited space for dialogue with Member States in processes organized by the UN, advocating directly with national governments must be a priority for civil society in the coming years.

7. Commitment: We will target Member States in our advocacy and develop a joint strategy to track progress. This should include a plan for joint advocacy at the local, national, regional and sub-regional levels in the lead-up to the RMRFs and prior to future IMRFs, including through meetings with regional/thematic groups of countries (such as GCM Champion Countries, the Friends of Migration group, GRULAC etc.)

Cooperation and advocacy together with local and regional authorities and governmental bodies must become a priority.

Local authorities are often more advanced than Member States when it comes to GCM implementation. They are also key civil society partners on the ground.

8. Commitment: Build on existing synergies with cities and strive to create new ones to strengthen joint advocacy from the bottom up to obtain action from Member States.

Civil Society self-organization must be fully respected within future IMRFs and RMRFs.

This will be key to ensuring real, meaningful participation of migrants and grassroots communities in a representative and coordinated manner. It will also be indispensable so that each constituency group (i.e. trade unions, diaspora, regions, etc.) can self-organize their engagement, and consequently self-select their own spokesperson to be and be accountable to their own group.

9. Commitment: Advocate for civil-society self-organizing with the UN and Member States at all levels. Collectively reject the role played by the UN in deciding who speaks and in what segment of the IMRF, especially when we are asked to speak on behalf of groups that we do not represent or are not a member of.

Process must never prevail over the advancement of thematic priorities.

Civil society advocacy should push for substantive changes in GCM implementation, first and foremost.

10. Commitment: Our advocacy strategy towards future IMRFs and RMRFs must be a ground-up strategy that truly reflects priorities on the ground. And to accomplish that, grassroots, local and national civil society organizations' participation in the RMRFs is key and should thus be advocated for whenever possible.

The GCM lacks a monitoring process to guide Member States and stakeholders' accountability and measurement of progress.

This contributes to overall progress moving slower than the desired pace towards achievement of the GCM objectives.

Clear indicators should be developed with significant input from civil society. As the Progress Declaration calls for a limited set of indicators to be developed with linkage to the SDGs monitoring, there is already growing concern that this monitoring framework may miss the opportunity to determine real progress.

11. Commitment: We will support the prompt set-up of the monitoring working group indicated in the UN Network on Migration’s annual work plan, with a requirement that civil society participation is mandatory and welcomed. The AC may consider producing progress indicators that our membership may use in grassroots-led progress reviews of the IMRF and hold Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to account.





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