

*Global Migration Challenges Speaker Series*

*The Global Migration Challenges series offers accessible, policy-focused conversations with leading experts, civil society, and practitioners. The series is presented with support from Immigration, Refugees, & Citizenship Canada, and the Canada Research Chair in Global Migration.*

*This report was prepared by students from the Lab's Graduate Student Research Initiative. For more information please email: [migration.munkschool@utoronto.ca](mailto:migration.munkschool@utoronto.ca).*

**Report 3**

**Refugee and Migration Compacts: Cooperation in an Era of Nationalism**

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Prepared by: Rachel Pagdin and Abhishek Kamat

**Participants:**

**Anne Staver:** “Of Two Minds: Reasserting National Control While Negotiating Global Migration Governance”

**James Milner:** “Collective Action in a Time of Populism: Everyday Politics and the Implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees”

**Discussant:**

**Jennifer Hyndman,** Director, Centre for Refugees Studies at York University

Issue

This speaker series focused on delineating the ratified Global Migration and Refugee Compacts as the most recent effort solidify a global agenda for the management of migration and refugees. It specifically focused on how the global community must navigate the environment of rising populism and successfully implement the principles of collective action that anchor each text. The speakers emphasized that in the development of the compacts the notion of collective action was largely taken for granted, and since their inception, the compacts have faced some backlash from the international community. To address skeptics, the speakers called for a shift in normative discourse from the international community. They specifically noted that

cooperation on managing migration and refugees is not something to be for or against but is instead a reality that all actors need to accept and move forward on.

### Discussion Summary

Anne Staver began the talk by distinguishing The Global Compact for Migration (GCM) and Global Compact for Refugees (GCR), as two separately negotiated texts. She emphasized that the intention of each compact was to see how existing international legal obligations of states can be applied to the context of migration. The GCR in particular was meant to address the growing numbers of people displaced by conflict, violence, human rights abuses, extremism, poor governance, environmental degradation, disasters, and the adverse impacts of climate change. Broadly, this compact recognizes the refugee problem as a “common concern of humankind” and is meant to garner more investment from governments, as well as the private sector, to encourage a more development-oriented approach from the onset of any new refugee crisis, as opposed to shorter-term humanitarian response. Similarly, the Global

Compact for Migration seeks to establish a cooperative approach to optimize the overall benefits of migration in the global community, while addressing its risks and challenges for individuals and communities in countries of origin, transit and destination. As per the United Nations, it is grounded in the values of state sovereignty, responsibility-sharing, non-discrimination, and human rights.

In reaction to their ratification, Staver stressed that the logic of collective action driving the GCM while well intended, had resulted in exacerbated socio-political tensions. Specifically, she emphasized that the pursuit of collective action inherently contradicts with the norm of state sovereignty. As such, the call for multi-lateral support from state governments for the ‘greater good’ has deepened tensions between technocratic and populist politics---as evidenced in the shifting political discourse in the United States and Germany. She also emphasized that the diffusion of collective action within state governments has been difficult, as different ministries approach migration issues uniquely. Interior ministries tend to focus inward on issues of the state and are more control oriented over who comes across their borders. In contrast, foreign ministries are aiming to uphold the diplomatic niceties and interstate relations that push for humanitarian assistance.

Taking a more localized lens to evaluating the compacts, Hyndman emphasized shifting the discourse away from the state level. She stressed in order for true collective action to be realized, we need to create space for civil society to operate. The relocation of people across borders is about more than just finding them a place to stay--- in many cases it’s about forging a new path, creating life, and being able to positively contribute

## Lessons Learned

The speakers all emphasized that collective action on migration and refugee management is not something to be for or against, but instead a reality that must be met with cooperation. They stressed that the compacts themselves are mere pieces of paper until they are pursued in tangible ways. Moving forward, there must be a narrative shift to bridge the divide between the technocratic and populist arguments. We must develop an approach that allows us to realize the convergence between the needs of refugees and the interests of states. In order to facilitate this approach, the newly established forums like the Global Refugee Forum in 2019 must be used effectively as a means to develop concrete options for burden sharing and increase solidarity amongst host states. On the matter of monitoring, the international community should actively formulate indicators quickly and in consultation with relevant stakeholders including refugees, migrant's civil society representatives, and humanitarian experts.

Milner also called for an independent body to assess progress and report on the fulfilment of each compact's objectives. He drew attention to the fact the success of these compacts often relies on organizations whose capacities is limited. For example, the UNHCR who is mandated to oversee the implementation of the GCR is heavily dependent on voluntary contributions from the global north who have an agenda of keeping refugees in the global south. The ability of the UNHCR to act is therefore susceptible to the wishes of countries like the U.S who contribute 35% of the UNHCR budget and have very conservative immigration policies. This constraint impedes the GCR preamble which stresses "international cooperation is necessary to make sure an effective response to needs of refugees." If this goal is to be realized, the international community needs to alter how progress is to be monitored.

Moving forward, Milner stressed that Canada will have to focus on five pillars of policy to realize the compacts:

1. Localization - there is no one size fits all approach to refugee and migrant resettlement, thus Canada must lead with nuance in localizing their approach.
2. Participation - the GCR highlights the importance of refugee participation. In developing relevant policy in Canada, we must ensure that refugees are not treated as passengers, but instead promote solutions that place refugees in the driver's seat.
3. Accountability - in order for the compacts to be realized, policy must ensure accountability of action. The compacts are merely pieces of paper until there are active steps to realizing its vision.

4. Political Will - Canada must move beyond bureaucracy and give meaning to the process through political will
5. Defining success - We must question and revisit how we define success in Canada. The self-reliance of refugees does not necessarily equate with a holistically adequate solution. Indicators of success must be developed in tandem with refugee and migrant communities to ensure all needs are met.

It's integral that we move forward in unity and cooperation on the fronts of migration and refugees. The GCR and GCM provide an important opportunity for the international community to solidify and normalize processes for refugee and migration management. Bringing the principles of collective action within this compact into practice will require a shift in discourse by the global community. While news headlines are ridden with narratives of crises and inaction, it is critical to understand that refugees and migration issues are not new nor are they beyond the scope of the international community. International actors, nation states and civil society alike, are more than capable of responding and should be prepared to do so. As the speakers emphasised, success will only occur if the global actors develop an approach that operates beyond political opinion and focuses more on necessity to address the unfolding problem.