



EMPLOYMENT LAW

Countries Coordinate on Migration Agreement

By Leah Shepherd
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Governments around the world are preparing to implement a historic agreement on migration, with employers poised to provide guidance.

In December 2018, 152 countries adopted the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), a nonbinding United Nations (U.N.) agreement that aims to make international migration safer and better regulated. Member countries maintain their autonomy in making legal decisions about immigration. The United States decided not to participate.

The U.N. and a network of U.N. agencies plan to convene a series of regional and global conferences over the next six years for governments to share ideas and best practices during the country-by-country rollout of the agreement.

Migration on the Rise

There were 257.7 million international migrants in 2017, which represents 3.4 percent of the world's population, according to the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. That number is up from 220 million in 2010.

Many migrants are seeking better job prospects and financial prosperity in a new country. "The wage differences and relative income gains from migration are largest for lower-skilled workers, whose international movements around the world are the most restricted," stated a report from the International Organization for Migration, the U.N.'s migration agency in Geneva.

The GCM contains "the promise of an evidence-based, less politically charged discourse on migration; a plan for developing more comprehensive policies to improve the lives of migrants and the communities in which they live; and the possibility to reduce dangerous, chaotic and irregular migration flows," said Antonio Vitorino, the International Organization for Migration's director general.

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The details and scope of implementing the GCM will vary by country. "Every government will go at its own pace and implement whatever they can implement with the means they have and the needs that they have," said Stephanie Winet, head of stakeholder engagement for the Global Forum on Migration and Development for the International Organization of Employers in Geneva.

To address refugee situations, the U.N. General Assembly last year affirmed a separate framework called the [Global Compact on Refugees](#).

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Employers' Perspective

Employers and labor organizations will make recommendations to governments as they carry out the GCM.

Representing employers' perspectives, the International Organization of Employers is promoting strategies to make immigration policy more predictable and humane while meeting labor market needs. It identified several priorities for employers, including:

- Ensuring fair and ethical recruitment to prevent human trafficking.
- Removing barriers to migrant entrepreneurship.
- Helping migrants and refugees find jobs.
- Recognizing degrees and work experience that migrants receive in foreign countries.

"We would expect to be engaged at the national level and at the U.N. conferences to make sure the private-sector voice is heard," Winet said. But don't expect big changes to appear quickly, since U.N. processes are slow, she added.

Ronnie Goldberg, senior counsel with the United States Council for International Business, agreed. "To the extent that it engenders the exchange of best practices, encourages more bilateral regional agreements among governments, and, most importantly, helps to bolster the position of business at the table, it will hopefully have some positive effect down the line," Goldberg said.

Said Boskovic, global manager of mobility and immigration at Elastic, a digital search company based in Mountain View, Calif., commented, "As our business has become more global, we believe that the GCM will provide us with the opportunity to attract a diverse workforce and identify resources across all regions."

Recruiting workers with the right skills remains a key concern for employers, regardless of where they are. "Seismic demographic shifts have created large



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skills gaps throughout the world, stunting business opportunities and economic growth. Migrant labor provides potential to fill hiring needs and facilitate business growth, yet there are challenges [that] inhibit the private sector's access to the migrant talent pool," an International Organization of Employers policy paper noted.

That issue extends across all industries and skill categories, Goldberg said. "The kind of legal pathways to be made [under the GCM] are not just for highly skilled personnel, but also for lesser-skilled categories of workers," she said.




U.S. employers can contact state lawmakers to discuss strategies for addressing the issues identified in the compact. "The United States has not adopted the GCM, but some of the local authorities are looking at it with a very positive view. Some of the local authorities may be interested in taking this GCM into account," Winet stated.

It's also important for businesses to consider migration's impact on the economy over time.

Migration can result in "the transfer of skills, knowledge and technology—effects that are hard to measure, but that could have considerable positive impacts on productivity and economic growth" the International Organization for Migration report noted. Migration "can reduce unemployment and underemployment, contribute to poverty reduction, and with appropriate supportive policies, foster broader economic and social development in origin countries in a variety of ways."

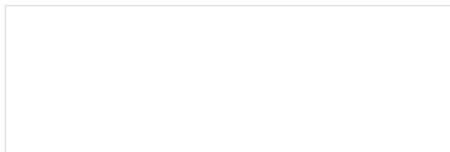
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