

## Executive Summary

# SPOTLIGHT REPORT ON GLOBAL MIGRATION

People have migrated since long before passports or borders were imposed, but today governments worldwide pour enormous resources into efforts to exclude, deter and punish them. Such efforts tend to ignore major push factors for migration, such as conflict, genocide, climate crises, and an economic system that perpetuates global inequality.

In the overview to the Spotlight Report on Global Migration 2026, **Carol Barton** notes multiple and interlinked challenges: the impact of environmental exploitation on Global South countries; the visa apartheid which blocks many of their citizens from easily crossing borders; populist leaders who villainize people born elsewhere; violence committed by security forces and vigilantes; overly bureaucratized and exclusionary migration pathways; the profitable surveillance and detention industries.

This report presents alternatives to our punitive, rights-averse status quo: positive initiatives by governments and by civil society. Migrants must be understood first and foremost as rights holders – with their human rights remaining intact regardless of whether or when any border is crossed. Governments must cease treating migrants as default threats, and instead reflect on the threats that their own policies and practices have posed to migrants – taking measures to transform them.

**Roula Seghaier** advocates for expansion of regular pathways to benefit migrants of all nationalities, incomes, skills and sectors. Their labor should not be enjoyed at the expense of their rights to political participation and family life.

Migrant domestic workers, excluded from labor legislation in many countries, are at particular risk of exploitation. **Adriana Paz Ramirez, Bariyah, and Grace Papa** call for abolishing employer-tied visas, reducing the potential for abuse.

The world has been slow to address climate migration, but **Amber S. Khan** and **Mayuri Anupindi** highlight positive moves in the Pacific. States must consult with affected people to develop frameworks, while taking genuine steps to reduce emissions.

Irregular migration is due to structural barriers, not personal choice. **Glenda Belen Huerto Vizcarra** makes the case for simplified regularization mechanisms that reflect migrants' realities, with pathways to permanent residence and citizenship available to all.

**Hayat Akbari, Hannah Jambunathan and Carolina Gottardo** argue that, as per the Global Compact for Migration, detention must be a genuine “measure of last resort”. Regularization must be prioritized, and current trends toward criminalizing assistance to migrants must be reversed.

Technology is being used to target migrants in increasingly drastic ways. **Antonella Napolitano** calls for limits to the scope and use of surveillance technologies, and safeguards to avoid misuse or overcollection of personal data.

An intersectional approach must be taken across these measures, recognizing structural barriers such as race, gender, class and religion. Migrants' own perspectives must be centered. With first-hand experience, they are best placed to identify the problems that persist in existing migration frameworks – and their solutions.

Xenophobic narratives now dominate our world. From “citizens-only” initiatives to physical harm, politicians and policymakers have normalized the idea that human rights do not apply to non-nationals, especially those with irregular migration status. But the threats faced by migrants today are not only interlinked. They are a close-up of those faced by everyone: expanded surveillance, climate crises, rollbacks of long-won human rights.

In 2026, the second International Migration Review Forum must make clear that migrants can no longer be excluded from fundamental human rights, from public and family life, from decent work, or from influencing the policies that impact them more than anyone. It's time for meaningful change.