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## What still needs to be said about the migration pact

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## What still needs to be said about the migration pact

Bonn, 10 December 2018. The UN migration pact has been at the heart of an intense political debate in Germany in recent weeks. Indeed, it was the AfD (Alternative for Germany) party that hugely whipped up the discussion, with the result that criticism also arose of the UN agreement from within other parties. Notwithstanding this, on 29 November 2018, a majority of the German Bundestag voted in favour of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, to give it its full title (or GCM for short). The accord is set to be adopted at a special UN summit convened especially for this purpose in Marrakesh on 10 and 11 December 2018. However, there are still questions that remain unanswered: How could the debate in Germany escalate like this? What does the conflict over the pact say about the way we deal with displacement and migration? And, most importantly of all, what could the pact achieve in practice?

For a long time, it seemed as if no one in Germany or even the rest of the world was that interested in the GCM, which was set in motion at the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants in New York in 2016 and has been the subject of negotiation since early 2017. While the German Government could certainly have promoted the pact more proactively, the allegation that it was planning to smuggle it past parliament and the public is untenable. Rather, the fact is that large parts of the media, the policy-making world and the public simply did not concern themselves with it. This changed for a short time when the Trump administration announced the United States' withdrawal from the GCM negotiations in December 2017. However, the US Government's decision, which was subsequently followed by the withdrawal of other countries (such as Australia, Hungary and Israel), did not lead in any way to a broad discussion in Germany. Even the AfD had not yet identified the potential – as to its own interests – for a debate about the pact at this stage. This situation only changed in autumn 2018.

The fact that the GCM discussion could intensify to such a degree shortly before its adoption by the international community is primarily the result of migration being viewed negatively in the public discourse, in some cases with alarmist undertones. Barely any distinction is being drawn between forced migration, irregular migration and labour/regular migration. The idea of (irregular) migration from Africa to Europe being the start of an enormous mass migration wave has already become firmly established in many areas of the public discourse. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that the aforementioned campaign by the AfD kicked up such a storm despite its demonstrably false statements on the content and meaning of the inter-

national accord (“a hidden resettlement programme for economic migrants fleeing poverty”). While it has been pointed out to critics in response that the pact is not even legally binding, this has fallen on deaf ears.

The GCM is a statement on the part of the international community of its intent to improve the situation of labour migrants around the world and create new opportunities for regular migration and its management. Ultimately, it arose from a recognition that no single country in the world could manage migration on its own, but that what is required is effective cooperation between the migrants' countries of origin, transit nations and host countries. The assertion by a significant number of media outlets that it is pretty pointless to sign up to non-binding agreements shows a certain naivety and ignorance in regard to international policy-making processes. After all, past attempts to bring about improvements through legally binding conventions only resulted in the major immigration countries refusing to participate. As such, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families has not yet been signed by a single destination country in the North.

Once the GCM has been adopted, it is then a case of continuing to work on and establishing the rules laid down, if not with everyone then at least with a coalition of the willing in the global North and South. In this way, the debate over the objectives and standards formulated in the pact will also create an opportunity to formulate and implement practical policies in Germany. Example of the German Skilled Labour Immigration Act (*Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz*): In Germany, regular migration, including from countries outside of Europe, is undoubtedly one way of solving problems such as expert shortages and the wide-ranging challenges of demographic change. Nonetheless, the legislation must be shaped in a way that takes account of the interests and needs of migrants, their families and their countries of origin, for example through the provision of needs-based training, the facilitation of low-cost remittances and the transferability of social security entitlements. This kind of fair migration management approach could enable better leveraging of the enormous development potential of migration for the countries of the global South. Beyond this, it could also create a competitive advantage for immigration countries that systematically implement the goals of the GCM when it comes to attracting specialists and workers. And this is what we need to keep talking to each other about.