



**Panel discussion on the International Convention on the Protection  
of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families  
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Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families  
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It is really with great pleasure that I am speaking on the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families - a topic that ICMC, and I personally, hold very close to our hearts. When it comes to the technical aspects of the convention, I'll leave it at the excellent coverage of my colleagues on the panel, some great people all of whom ICMC has in one capacity or another had a close working relationship with throughout the years.

If you allow me, I would like to take you on a brief journey of this convention through the eyes of first ICMC and second, through the eyes of a human rights student and activist.

Over the years ICMC has been very active on the Migrant Workers Convention, and with its Committee. Mariette Grange worked with us in ICMC in the past (indeed she all but created its advocacy office). While she was with us she wrote a widely acclaimed [“toolkit” on the Convention](#), which also looks at migrant-related rights across the other nine core international human rights treaties. In 2010, ICMC led the writing of the first General Comment on the convention, relating to the protection of Migrant Domestic Workers.

In more recent years, ICMC has been the coordinator of [the Civil Society Days in the GFMD](#). While in some ways this has expanded the focus of ICMC due to the much broader scope that the GFMD caters for, every year at this event, the central, explicit repeated demand of civil society has been the same; it calls for the ratification and implementation of the Migrant Workers Convention by states.



Unfortunately, for the last five or even ten years, it seems that many of us – including too much of civil society – have become lethargic in our activities around the convention on migrant workers. At the same time, ratification has been stymied by a real lack of political will. The convention is superfluous, they tell us. No added value, they say.

Well, I came from the East and Southern Africa Government Consultation on [Migrants in Countries in Crisis](#) or the MICIC initiative in Rwanda just the other week and its related civil society consultation the week before in Kenya, and I tell you there is a gap that can be filled by the ratification and proper implementation of the Migrant Workers Convention. I heard described situations such as the xenophobic attacks targeting Southern African migrant workers, I heard of Somali migrants being profiled and persecuted because of Al Shabaab attacks, I heard a regional concern, which even governments expressed, about the exploitation of their migrant workers abroad in other regions.

Migrants’ rights are human rights, and yes, while it is true that bits and pieces of various other treaties protect different rights of and types of migrants, it is this convention that we need; Migrant workers are a vulnerable group, and they need a coherent international standard to protect them in ordinary times. Evidence has shown us time and again, as civil society constantly reiterates, that if a proper framework is in place for migrants’ rights in ordinary times, they have a far greater capacity to protect themselves in times of crisis when they are especially vulnerable.

In the world we live in today, there is no country that is just an origin, or just a destination country for migrant workers. Every single country hosts a migrant community, and every country has nationals living outside its borders.

But thankfully, the global community seems to be waking up after a long hibernation on this issue. The [High-level Meeting on Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants](#) in September, and Ban Ki Moon’s call for a [Global Compact on Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration](#) as an outcome, point to possible great leaps forward on this issue. The campaigns against xenophobia sprouting up all over the world by all sorts of stakeholders are – I hope – a sign of a turning tide on this issue. And if I may say so, it’s about time.

As I mentioned before, I have a personal and deep attachment to this convention (and here is where I “take off” the hat of ICMC and replace it with that of an ex-student



activist). In my Masters degree on Human Rights, we were a group of 100 students representing every continent of the world. During our studies, we were surprised to learn that one of the ten core human rights treaties remained largely unratified. When we delved deeper, we found an alarming lack of resources and activity on the migrant workers convention, on its implementation and even on its promotion among civil society.

We were shocked and appalled in a way that only the most self righteous and naïve of human rights students can be. But things are simple when you are a student. We were indignant, so we started a campaign, and we called ourselves [Migrants Matter](#).

At the European Development Days in Brussels in 2013, Migrants Matter performed a flash-mob singing demonstration calling on EU Member States to ratify the Convention. (don't worry – I won't give you a repeat performance).

On every International Migrants' Day since 2013, an event has been organised by the Campaign on the streets of Venice, where masked activists walk silently through the streets with signs spelling out a call to ratify.

From 2014 to present, activists gather in Brussels to run through the 'European Capital' in a half-marathon to raise awareness about the convention.

Migrants Matter posed a [Parliamentary Question](#) to the European Commission, presented through Iñaki Fernandez, Spanish MEP from the Greens/European Free Alliance. This question, which was [later answered by the Commissioner for Home Affairs](#) pointed out the fact that the Convention is the only one of the ten core human rights instruments that has yet to be ratified by the EU Member States. We emphasised that its ratification could ensure that fundamental human rights, already recognised by the EU countries, would be officially extended to migrants.

We were a group of students who were doing this work in our spare time. It was a campaign created by students, led by students and is ongoing even today with some alumni from our course. We were not getting paid, and we did not receive a cent of funding for the activities I've just mentioned. But the most remarkable thing of all was that we felt within a few months that we were at the forefront of the work being carried out on the Convention. We had one-on-one skype conferences with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants. We were exchanging emails with Members of the European Parliament. In the space of a year we hit over 2,000 likes on [Facebook](#) and had a steady audience on our blog from all over the world.

All of this is not to tell you that we were exceptionally gifted communicators, or



activists, because we weren't. It is to show you that people care about the Convention and what it stands for. We scraped away at just a corner of its potential and people responded and reacted and participated.

There is still a gap there – one that needs to be filled by the Committee holding up their convention with confidence, states party to the convention implementing the protections proudly because they're ahead of the game, and states that have yet to ratify thinking very carefully about the current global trend on migration policy, and whether, without positive action, they might be the ones left behind.

I would just like to finish by reiterating, that there is a lot of civil society, at all levels, who are determined to persevere until this convention takes its rightful place alongside the other widely ratified core human rights treaties.

Thank you.