

4 December 2018

Dear representatives,

Why Australia must adopt the Global Compact on Migration (GCM): A public letter to our parliamentarians

We, the leaders and representatives of faith groups, migrant communities, peak bodies, and international NGOs, write to express our disappointment at our government's decision to withdraw from the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), and urge them to reconsider.

As the GCM is a non-binding instrument, any Australian government will have a choice to determine how to implement the Compact in line with national priorities and laws. Adopting the Compact will not undermine Australia's ability to determine migration policy.

So why, we ask, is the government so intent on withdrawing?

The success of modern Australia is synonymous with our multicultural story. We have a long track record of welcoming migrants and refugees into this country. We do so proudly and to the effect of untold social, cultural, and economic benefits for all Australians.

Voters across Australia are calling for migration policy that reflects and reaffirms these values and this history. In choosing to withdraw from the GCM, we question whether the government has heard the community's unequivocal call for welcoming migrants and refugees and treating them with dignity and respect.

The GCM itself is a historic development in the global governance of migration and withdrawing is a significant missed opportunity whose ramifications will be felt for years to come.

It is the first time that the world's nations have come together in agreement on frameworks, principles, and concrete actions to deal with the growing complexity and scale of human mobility.

The Asia-Pacific region is at the forefront of this complexity. Common understandings, shared responsibilities and unity of purpose are vital in order for all countries to promote safe, orderly sustainable and welcoming policies on migration in decades to come.

The GCM provides an obvious platform for such cooperation and Australia could bring so much to the table. We have a wealth of experience running one of the largest and most successful migration and humanitarian programs in the world.

Over 180 countries have agreed to adopt the GCM, including significant partners – Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand – in the region, and so the potential for Australia to share insights is enormous.

Conversely, sticking with the current government's decision will leave us isolated in the region, and create a leadership vacuum that others will fill. No country can manage migration on its own.

Worse still, we find ourselves in the unlikely company of populist, anti-immigration governments including the United States, Hungary and Austria.

We must ask ourselves whether this is the kind of country we are or want to be.

List of signatories (in alphabetical order):

Australian Council for International Development (ACFID)
Act for Peace
Amnesty International Australia
Asylum Seekers Centre
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
Australian Association of Social Workers
Australian Churches Refugees Taskforce (ACRT)
Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)
Australian National Committee on Refugee Women (ANCORW)
Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project
Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA)
Catholic Mission
Caritas Australia
Common Grace
End Child Detention Coalition (ECDC)
Federation of Ethnic Community Councils of Australia (FECCA)
Hazara Women of Australia
International Detention Coalition (IDC)
Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Australia
Jesuit Social Services
Justice for Refugees SA
Love Makes A Way
Pacific Focal Point GCM, Pacific Civil Society
Refugee Advice and Casework Service (RACS)
Refugee Council of Australia
Refugee Nurses of Australia
Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) Australia (National)
Settlement Services International (SSI)
Social Responsibilities Committee, Anglican Church of South Queensland
St Francis Social Services (House of Welcome)
St Vincent De Paul Society National Council
UNICEF Australia
Uniting Church Assembly in Australia
UNSW Forced Migration Research Network