

# **Between shrinking spaces, meaningful participation and “zoomification”: Civil society and the International Migration Review Forum**

**Stefan Rother, University of the Bundeswehr Munich /  
Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institute at the University of Freiburg**

This presentation will map the advocacy of migrant civil society in the implementation and monitoring process of the Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration (GCM) leading up to and including the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF). For migrants' rights activists, the shift of migration governance deliberations from informal spaces such as the GFMD into the UN system has been a mixed blessing. On the one hand, the advocacy of global migrant civil society has very much influenced the format and content of the process. Several issues have found their way into the global compact and the IMRF progress declaration which would otherwise have received less or no recognition: these include wage theft, regular pathways, child rights and access to services regardless of status.

On the other hand, migrant civil society has denounced the shrinking space for its involvement at the UN level. This includes opportunities to engage directly and as equally important stakeholders and principles of self-organizing and self-representation. The shift towards virtual meetings as a result of the pandemic (“zoomification”) has been another mixed blessing. The online format has provided potentially easier access to the “invited spaces” of consultations, while opportunities for meaningful participation in particular in the regional reviews of the GCM have been very limited.

Migrant civil society advocacy must thus feel at times like a Sisyphus' struggle: While it may at times have succeeded in expanding its space for meaningful participation such as during the GCM deliberations, this space is under permanent threat to be limited again. Regarding content, the various revisions of the IMRF progress declaration have shown that without constant migrant civil society interventions, several essential issues would have fallen off the agenda. This paper therefore argues that if the GCM wants to live up to its proposed “whole of society”-approach, it has to acknowledge the agency of migrant civil society and provide it with permanent resources for self-organizing and -representation – not (only) as a means in itself, but also for the sake of more well-informed and inclusive implementation and monitoring of the GCM.