



THE CONTEXT

From May 5 – 8, 2026, leaders convened at the United Nations 2nd International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) to assess multilateral and national responses to global migration flows. The meeting and its declaration were rejected by the United States. In this inaugural episode of ¿Qué PASA?, PASA's advisors discuss the UN Global Compact on Migration, the 2026 IMRF, and the state of migration and multilateralism in the Americas.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Migration is inherently transnational, yet prevailing political positions are pulling governments toward unilateral, securitized responses. The result is a widening gap between discourse and operational reality. Even governments as hostile toward multilateralism as the Trump administration, must depend on international cooperation to execute their migration agendas. The future of migration governance will hinge less on the survival of any single global framework than on how states, regional blocs, cities, and non-state actors confront tensions and shift how they cooperate.

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Migration has been central in the global policy agenda. The EU's new [Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) takes effect in June, while Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and several Central American countries are renegotiating migration policy within active electoral cycles. The 2026 IMRF reaffirmed the UN Global Compact on Migration but exposed sharp divides over sovereignty, return, and the role of multilateral institutions.

REGIONAL POSITIONS AT IMRF

- **Mexico, Uruguay, Brazil, Ecuador.** Reaffirmed the Compact and showcased integration-focused models, while positioning themselves as champions of best practices.
- **Venezuela.** Notably softened its traditional anti-U.S. rhetoric and pivoted to its 'return to homeland' plan, which aligns rhetorically with U.S. reintegration priorities.
- **Cuba.** Held a sharper antagonistic line, framing the U.S. embargo as a root cause of migration and accusing Washington of using migrants as political pawns.

THE VOLUNTARY RETURN PROBLEM

Voluntary return is one of the three traditional '[durable solutions](#)' of the [refugee regime](#), but it is being conflated with '[remigration](#),' a term that carries forced and ideological connotations. While return maybe realistic for short, well-defined crises, it is not a solution for populations well-embedded in host countries, nor for structurally unstable origin countries. For instance, many Venezuelans and Cubans have built lives abroad, making return difficult. The gap between political promises and the impractical, often harmful, reality of remigration defines this moment.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Mercosur and Argentina. Mercosur citizens currently move across member states with only an ID. More restrictive migration measures proposed by Argentina's Milei Administration could create tensions with Mercosur's regional mobility framework.

Spain's regularization. The Spanish government's [plan](#) to regularize up to 500,000 migrants—with a preference for those from Latin America—is a counter-model to Europe's rightward shift.

Root causes. Aid cuts, securitized and restrictive immigration policies, and large-scale deportations into fragile origin countries risk exacerbating the very drivers of migration that current policy is designed to suppress.

Subnational actors. Cities, federated states/territories, and non-state actors will absorb a larger share of migration governance as nations retreat.

The refugee regime. Withdrawals from international institutions and trends in voluntary and forced returns, show how the norms of the [1951 Refugee Convention](#) are being challenged.

THE SOVEREIGNTY DEBATE

The Trump administration has framed its rejection of the Global Compact as a defense of sovereignty against overreaching global institutions. That framing misreads the instrument. The Compact is non-binding and one of its bedrock principles is national sovereignty over migration policy. [Objective 21](#) of the Compact promotes safe and dignified return and reintegration, aligning with stated U.S. goals. The dispute is less about content than about the political and ideological context in which it is being litigated.

THE OPERATIONAL CONTRADICTION

Migration is by definition transnational; flows move through multiple jurisdictions, and enforcement choices in one country produce downstream effects in others. The [U.S. policy toolkit](#)—mass deportation, third-country agreements, and [border militarization](#)—requires cooperation with receiving states, transit countries like [Mexico](#), and bilateral partners such as El Salvador and [Guatemala](#). Multilateralism is rejected rhetorically while global cooperation is still required for policy execution.

ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC STAKES

- **Well-managed migration is an economic engine.**
 - **Taxed economic integration.** [In 2023 alone](#), immigrants in the U.S. paid \$600B+ in taxes.
 - **Remittances.** In some Central American countries, remittances account for [over a quarter of GDP](#).
- **Demographics.** Migration is a [primary offset](#) to declining birth rates in the U.S. and across the region.