



The Impact of Crises on the Global Governance of Migration: Boost or Blow?

Researchers

Prof. Sandra Lavenex (UNIGE, Polsci)

Prof. Vincent Chetail (IHEID, Law)

Mariana Ferolla (IHEID, Law)

Dr. Karin Vaagland (UNIGE, Polsci)

Associated researchers:

Dr. Philipp Lutz (Ambizione)

Maud Bachelet (Ambizione)

Dr. Frowin Rausis (Horizon Europe)

Additional information

Timeline: 2022-2026

Budget: 600'000 CHF

Description

Crises can be catalysts or drawbacks for governance and the rule of law. The narrative of crisis expresses urgency for solutions. Yet, the urgency of action may disrupt agreed principles, legal standards, and long-term goals. Drawing on theories of policy change, we examine the narrative construction and legal-political impact of crises in selected global and regional cooperation processes, using a longitudinal perspective (1970s-today). Distinguishing between periods of endogenous crisis, exogenous crisis, and no crisis, we investigate how institutional and legal regimes, country composition, and the type of migration shape crisis narratives, under what conditions crisis narratives have been catalytic for cooperative solutions, and how these solutions affect structures of authority, policy substance, and legal norms. We place particular emphasis on how crisis-induced policy and legal changes affect the continuum between short-term mobility and long-term migration and privileges ('hierarchizes') particular forms of human movement over others, and how these choices evolve over time.

First Results:

I. UNHCR governance through crisis narratives is strongest between 1985-1990 and centers on UNHCR funding. We identify two crises discourses engendering institutional change: First, that UNHCR was not efficiently managing its finances and projects, resulting in increased Member State oversight. Second, that UNHCR was not adequately responding to increased migration to Western Europe, leading to the creation of new regional organizations and a fragmentation of the migration regime.

II. Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)

The narratives produced by the so-called "migration crisis" of 2015 contributed to the establishment of the UN's GCM which tries to balance migrant protection and state sovereignty. In a forthcoming Oxford Handbook, Editor V. Chetail provides a commentary on the GCM's objectives and identifies ways forward to improve the Compact's implementation in compliance with international law and migrants' human rights.

