

Conceptualizing migration at the UN: A text analysis of the narratives produced by IOM and UNHCR on forced migration

Abstract

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In the absence of a binding and coherent international migration regime, the global governance of migration relies on normative narratives produced by UN agencies and other intergovernmental processes, in line with the discursive legitimacy traditionally associated with international organizations, and of which the 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration provides a recent example. Such narratives impact migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees because they support certain policy frameworks among member states. Yet, global migration governance remains fragmented, especially as far as the long-standing divide between IOM and UNHCR is concerned. This paper contributes to this discussion by applying Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis to the discourses produced by these two organizations, with a specific focus on forced migration (an issue that is of interest and relevance to both). Analysing a large corpus of text produced by the two organizations using quantitative text analysis methods, the paper identifies some of the dominant worldviews on forced migration in each; it further maps the reciprocal influence of IOM and UNHCR narratives on each other. Results show that IOM and UNHCR have distinct worldviews, associated with different textual patterns, and that, while IOM textual productions seem to influence UNHCR's discourses, the opposite is less true. This would support the view that IOM is currently the leading actor in terms of framing forced migration, thereby exerting a strong influence on global migration governance.

Authors' Bio

Antoine Pécoud is Professor of Sociology at the University of Sorbonne Paris Nord and research associate at CERI/Sciences Po. His research focuses on the global governance of migration and the role of intergovernmental organisations in migration politics. His last book is *The International Organization for Migration. The New 'UN Migration Agency' in Critical Perspective* (Palgrave, 2020).

Brandon Green is an MPhil/PhD Student in Social Research Methods at the London School of Economics, Department of Methodology, where he is working to develop and apply mixed-methods text/discourse analysis to global migration governance, followed by participant/observant ethnographies to identify how these discourses are practiced in the every day by international migration civil servants.