



**Thinking beyond the crisis:  
Labour migration and mobility in the Euro-Mediterranean region  
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**POLICY AND PROGRAMMATIC PAPER**

This policy and programmatic paper summarises key outcomes of a high-level meeting held in Rome, 19 May 2017, a meeting that brought together a wide range of experts including policy makers, civil servants, academics, and staff from international organizations and the private sector. The keynote speech, which launched the event, was from Franco Frattini, President of the Italian Society for International Organization (SIOI), as well as former Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs and former Vice-President of the European Commission and European Commission for Justice, Freedom and Security. It was followed by the first panel that focused on the political and policy dimensions of labour migration in the Mediterranean. This panel brought together Nathalie Tocci (Director of Istituto Affari Internazionali, IAI), Lia Quartapelle (Member of the Chamber of Deputies of the Italian Parliament) and Tatiana Esposito (Director General for Immigration and Integration Policies at the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies). The speakers discussed the effectiveness of development aid, the necessity to go beyond short-term policies, to find legal routes for labour migrants, and the integration challenges faced by migrants in Europe and Italy. The second panel looked at the socio-demographic situation in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region and in Europe and how it is related to migration. The speakers were Daniela Huber (Senior Fellow at IAI), Paola Termine (Rural Youth Migration Officer at the Food and Agriculture Organization), and Anna di Bartolomeo (Senior Research Fellow at the University of Venice). Panellists debated the demographic dynamics on both sides of the Mediterranean, the role of youth unemployment in decisions to emigrate from the MENA region, the effectiveness of development aid in tackling this problem, and the economic need for labour migrants in Europe. The aim of this event is to create a forum for the discussion of the dynamics of migration from the Middle East and North Africa area to Europe with a focus on its governance, underlying socio-demographic patterns, and labour market needs. This goal was reached through a very lively debated that was greatly enriched by the different perspectives offered by this diverse set of stakeholders.

There was general consensus that migratory flows should not and will not be stopped. Therefore, migration is not a phenomenon that should be conceived in terms of isolated crises. Policy makers need, instead, a long-term perspective. Structural conditions such as large youth populations in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region and high youth unemployment rates will continue to produce



labour migration in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, the dire economic situation of many Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, compounded by other factors such as the effects of climate change, is likely to push many, predominantly young people, to try to reach Europe. Europe, at the same time, faces serious economic and demographic challenges because of its rapidly ageing population. This could make welfare systems unsustainable, reduce the size of the internal market, and lead to an older workforce with outdated skills. During the debate, the need for a coherent long-term vision to govern migration at the supranational level was discussed. As mentioned by Dr. Frattini in the keynote speech, migration is a global phenomenon and policy responses to it need to be formulated at the international level. Myopic responses driven by national political issues prevent the emergence of a more cohesive long-term strategy for migration governance. This long-term vision should centre around:

- the creation of routes for labour migrants to enter Europe legally;
- an integration policy that makes migrants currently residing in Europe and those that are likely to enter the EU in the future productive members of their host countries;
- an effective design of development aid policies that promote inclusive growth in migrants' countries of origin;
- enhanced understanding of the structure of attitudes to immigration in destination countries, how they translate into political support and how policy makers react to them when forging migration policies.

Given the multifaceted nature of the debate, the policy recommendations emerging from the discussion touch upon a wide range of issues. The points below illustrate the main conclusions reached as an outcome of the debate, as well as how they were informed by the discussion that took place during the high-level meeting.

**1. Migration policies should be concerted at the EU level in the long-term interest of Europe as a whole, and not be determined by short-term national political pressure**

The migration crisis is not a crisis of numbers but a political and institutional crisis. Europe's response to increased migration flows has largely been based on domestic political considerations. This makes for ineffective, myopic and patchy policies. Since migration is not a fleeting phenomenon, the EU needs to manage flows coherently in a way that can benefit the EU's economies in the long-run. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a more effective common EU asylum system; ensure better coordination between member states on targets; increase investment in integration; and ensure that resettlement programmes function effectively. The EU should develop a strategy to more effectively use labour migration as a resource to confront the demographic and economic challenges that the EU will face in the near future. This might include assessing the skills needed in the labour market and attracting economic migrants that can replenish a shrinking workforce while providing competencies lacking in domestic labour markets. If properly managed, migration could become an opportunity. It is an opportunity that Europe should not miss out on.

## **2. Create more legal channels for labour migration**

The EU's population is rapidly ageing. In the absence of migration, this will lead to a smaller overall population, a smaller proportion of the overall population in the workforce, and an older workforce. These trends could have a wide range of negative economic implications such as reducing the size of the common market, making welfare systems unsustainable, and meaning outdated skills within the labour market. Since many migrants wishing to enter Europe are economic migrants and European economies could benefit from their presence, a comprehensive policy for labour migration should be put in place. New routes for labour migration need to be established to better manage these flows and to allow the EU to select, more efficiently, the economic migrants that are necessary for boosting European economies. Migrants working in Europe illegally are less likely to contribute productively to European economies. They are also harder to integrate in the local labour markets and often apply for asylum in order to be able to stay, thus clogging up the asylum application system. Along with increasing the number of people that are granted visas for work reasons, schemes for temporary seasonal workers should be established and the EU's 'Blue Card' Directive needs to be made effective throughout the EU.

## **3. More investment in long-term integration policies**

To make migrants productive in EU economies it is necessary to integrate them in the national labour markets, as well as more generally in European societies. Much attention (and many resources) in Europe have been concentrated on first reception and border control. However, focusing on integration is a crucial part of a long-term perspective of migration management. Making sure that immigrants are able to work to their full potential in European labour markets should be seen as a long-term investment that would be likely to bring significant returns. At the same time, exploitation in the shadow economy needs to be addressed, offering immigrants' viable opportunities to be legally employed and combating criminal networks. More specifically, countries should invest in: continued language training for immigrants; programmes to help them navigate local labour markets; recognition for qualifications earned in countries of origin; systems for certifying skills gained informally in countries of origin, and courses to overcome cultural barriers. These investments are likely to pay off, generating a more dynamic and a younger workforce that would, in turn, create new jobs. Regularly employed young immigrants will also greatly contribute financially to the welfare of their host countries through the taxes they will pay over the course of their lives.

## **4. Use development aid effectively and better understand its role in stemming migration**

The effectiveness of development aid in tackling poverty and unemployment is questionable; even less clear is its effect on people's decisions to migrate. On one side, creating more opportunities in countries of origin reduces the need to migrate. On the other, people that have more resources might be more likely to choose to invest them in trying to build a better future in Europe. Since development aid has become such an important and expensive component of European migration policies, its effectiveness should be studied further and resources might be spent more effectively within Europe, for example, in integration policies. Turning specifically to

the North African region, EU-promoted development policies oriented towards more flexible labour markets, have not stopped youth unemployment from growing. Youth unemployment, in turn, is a key determinant of emigration from the region. Policies need to cater to local needs and lessons from other countries should be drawn. Finally, remittances and diaspora organizations in destination countries can have a key role in promoting development in origin countries. These resources should be used to their fullest potential.

**5. Better understand attitudes to migration and how they shape policy-makers' short-term political considerations**

Policy makers are often reticent about promoting migration reforms that they believe would be unpopular among electorates. Indeed, political unfeasibility is cited as one of the main reasons agreements cannot be reached on long-term strategies and on potentially economically beneficial reforms. Politicians fear that they may be costly in terms of consensus; however, it is not clear that attitudes change very much in response to specific events or reforms. To see whether this is indeed the case, it would be necessary to gain a deeper understanding of attitudes towards migration in receiving countries and how they translate into support for or opposition to migration.

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