



**Thinking beyond the crisis:
Labour migration and mobility in the Euro-Mediterranean region
19 May 2017
Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome**

SUMMARY REPORT

Migration is and will continue to be a key component of the political, economic, and demographic dynamics at play on both sides of the Mediterranean. It is, therefore, necessary to look beyond the present crisis when analysing these issues. This was the objective of the high-level meeting held in Rome, 19 May 2017, that brought together a wide range of experts including policy makers, civil servants, academics, and staff from international organizations and the private sector (41 participants representing 27 different institutions). The discussion was greatly enriched by the different perspectives offered by this diverse set of stakeholders.

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 Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security. Dr. Frattini highlighted the asymmetry between the global dimension in which migratory phenomena take place and the national dimension in which decisions are made. He posited that the migration crisis in Europe was a crisis of political leadership; countries were unable to look beyond domestic politics and coordinate effectively. Indeed, the March 2016 agenda has not been implemented and the EU-Turkey deal was very much driven by short-term considerations. He also stressed the lack of solidarity between European countries as a crucial problem that leaves much of the burden on Southern European countries. To counteract national differences in managing migratory flows, he flagged up the need for a common European asylum system, shared rules to differentiate between economic migrants and refugees, and the importance of defending the Schengen system. Furthermore, Dr. Frattini stated that there is a need for more channels for economic migrants to reach Europe legally, for example through seasonal migration schemes and the implementation of the Blue Card programme. Europe needs, also, to fight the exploitation of migrants in the shadow economy hard. Lastly, Dr. Frattini touched on the importance of development aid in allowing migrants to remain in their countries of origin and build a better future for themselves there. Development aid, however, is often ineffective and 80% of EU Aid to Africa does not reach the intended recipients. Remittances and microfinance



programmes were identified as crucial instruments for the EU to promote development in migrant countries of origin.

Dr. Frattini's speech was followed by the first panel that focused on the political and policy dimensions of labour migration in the Mediterranean. It expanded on some of the topics touched upon in the keynote speech such as the effectiveness of development aid and its impact on migration. It also looked at 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. Speakers' presentations lasted about ten minutes and the remaining time was allotted to discussions between panellists and participants.

The debate was opened by Nathalie Tocci, Director of Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and Special Adviser to the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini. Dr. Tocci described migration discourse as two separate monologues, both characterized by short-term vision. The first monologue centres around "stopping the flow" and concentrates on security considerations, border controls, repatriation policies and on efforts to promote development in countries of origin to stop migrants from reaching Europe. The second monologue focuses on humanitarian issues and on the moral duty of Europeans to welcome refugees. However, as was implicit in Dr. Frattini's speech, there is the assumption that migration is a burden and not an opportunity that should be managed with an eye to the long-term. Dr. Tocci underlined that the migration crisis was not a crisis of numbers but of governance and that migration cannot and should not be stopped. A more efficient long-term labour migration policy should include more legal channels, as well as a development aid policy that tackles Africans' key needs.

Lia Quartapelle, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of the Italian Parliament and Member of the Committee on Foreign and European Community Affairs, picked up the considerations made on development stating that there is little evidence of the effectiveness of development aid in stemming migration. Poverty and unemployment are, indeed, root causes of migration, but aid is often ineffective and their relationship with migration is not linear. She also stressed the importance of integration policies that enable economic migrants to be productively employed in the European and Italian labour markets. In Italy, the labour market is slowly recovering from the economic crisis but this upturn does not include migrant workers. Integration policies can be very expensive but they need to be considered as a long-term investment. Summing up, she notes that the crucial issues concerning migration in the Mediterranean are not to be found in the Mediterranean itself, but in development policies in countries of origin and in integration policies in countries of destination.

Tatiana Esposito, Director General for Immigration and Integration Policies at the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, helped contextualize issues concerning migration and integration for Italy by providing statistics that helped understand the magnitude of the phenomena. She stated that while the media often focuses on the 180,000 migrants entering Italy illegally *per* year, few report that there are five million immigrants that regularly work in Italy and 800,000 immigrant children attending schools in Italy. Also, migrants coming from different countries of origin face different types of integration challenges. Integration policies, thus, need to be tailored to each community. For example, she mentioned that while for Egyptians the Ministry needed to plan specific gender-based activities, this was not the case for Moroccans. Furthermore, among Egyptians there are many unaccompanied minors and

the numbers of these minors doubled in 2016. Addressing the debate on the necessity to open legal channels for labour migrants, she mentioned that Italy has gone in the opposite direction by reducing the number of permits granted from 250,000 in 2007 to 30,000 in 2017. This trend can only be reversed if there is the political will to pass laws that allow for more visas to be issued. In a country like Italy that faces 40% youth unemployment and a politically unstable situation this is difficult to achieve. Furthermore, while migration affects the whole country, labour and integration policies are regional. The Ministry cannot centrally coordinate reforms and interventions on vulnerable targets. Lastly, Dr. Esposito commented on issues raised during the discussion such as the malfunctioning of the Blue Card system in Italy and Europe and the efforts Italy has made to stop migrants' labour exploitation in agriculture.

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. Countries in the MENA region have very young populations and growing working age populations. Job creation is often, however, insufficient and youth unemployment rates are very high throughout the region. Indeed, youth unemployment in the region is one of the key migration drivers. Panelists discussed the effectiveness of job creation strategies in the MENA area, as well as development policies that would curb the necessity to migrate. Conversely, in Europe the population is ageing and in the absence of migration this might pose serious economic challenges.

Daniela Huber, Senior Fellow at IAI, discussed the failure of the development model promoted by the EU and the US in Tunisia and Morocco. This model was based primarily on 'flexicurity' and on neoliberal policies that increased labour market precarity, as well as the predominance of the informal economy. These policies focused on promoting an education system tailored to the needs of the markets instead of to those of young locals. She stressed the importance of investing instead in a youth sensitive approach that strengthens social security. Given the relevance that youth unemployment has for migration from these countries to Europe, it is in the EU's best interest to learn from past mistakes in this field.

Paola Termine, Rural Youth Migration Officer at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), expanded on the considerations made by Dr. Huber and talked about the importance of creating employment in agriculture, an important sector across MENA. She stressed that it is necessary to include a gender dimension to these efforts given the low participation rate of women in the labour market. Also, young people encounter many difficulties when starting a business because they often lack access to credit, land, information, and networks. Dr. Termine posits that emigration from North Africa has both a positive and negative impact on rural development in this region. On the one hand, development is fostered by remittances and financial and know-how support of diaspora organizations in destination countries. These tools need to be used to their fullest potential drawing from the lessons learned in the past and in other countries in the region. However, emigration can also hamper development in North Africa depriving these countries of people with valuable skills (brain drain). This phenomenon needs to be counteracted creating jobs that offer stable opportunities for young people within origin countries.

Anna di Bartolomeo, Senior Research Fellow at the University of Venice, looked at the relationship between demographic dynamics and migration both in countries of origin and in Europe. Dr. di

Bartolomeo noted that migrants from different origin countries contribute differently to the demographic challenges in Europe. MENA migrants are much more likely than in the past to be single when they arrive in Europe. They do not come to Europe with family members and do not need to provide for a family in their countries of origin (this phenomenon is known as “individual migration”). Therefore, they are less likely to send remittances to these countries and invest their earnings in the countries of destination, primarily in education. If this phenomenon is managed well it can contribute positively to the economies of the countries they settle in. Individual migration is not a trend for migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA); here, however, there is a strong growth in the proportion of young people who are likely to migrate. Dr. di Bartolomeo also pointed out that the emphasis on development aid in SSA might be counterproductive in terms of migration: more educated young people that have more access to resources are *more* not less likely to migrate. With regards to Europe, Dr. di Bartolomeo identified three key trends related to the ageing population there: (i) in the absence of migration, the total population of the EU will decrease dramatically which will make Europe less influential internationally and reduce the size of the internal market; (ii), the EU workforce is rapidly shrinking and this could undermine the sustainability of the welfare system, while immigrants to the EU are overwhelmingly young and could be a crucial resource to reversing this trend; and, (iii) an ageing workforce has a different set of skills with respect to young workers that have recently been formed – skills in the workforce thus become outdated. Dr. di Bartolomeo posited that a well devised policy on labour migration could foster the economies of EU countries that are likely to face skill and workforce shortages in the near future.

The debate with participants touched upon the necessity for the EU to manage migration more effectively, adopting a long-term perspective. Integration policies that help migrants become productive members of their host societies were stressed. Participants also debated the effectiveness of development aid in general and whether it can and should be used to stem migration. Finally, the importance of understanding attitudes to migration and how they influence politicians’ policy choices came up as a crucial step in making better policies politically viable.

The event created 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. The inclusion of participants from diverse institutions such as academia, international organizations, and policy makers was very useful in fostering a debate that included diverse points of view. For example, involving policy makers along with academics helped understand the practical limitations of implementing theoretically sound policies. The discussion among speakers who work on both sides of the Mediterranean, gave the possibility to discuss the impact of development policies in countries of origin as well as their original aim. Lastly, covering the topic of labour migration in the Mediterranean in all its facets was extremely useful in understanding how they all come together. It is very rare for an event to debate these issues from such diverse standpoints; the wide and comprehensive perspective offered, gave participants a unique opportunity to learn from and interact with stakeholders tackling labour migration in the Mediterranean under different angles.

The event was very successful in terms of feedback received by participants and quality of the debate. However, there were some challenges in its organisation primarily related to lack of time, difficulties in finding high-level Italian stakeholders available to present in English, involving migration skeptics while ensuring the quality of the debate, and engaging local actors. To overcome these issues in the future it would be advisable to start planning this type of event earlier – approximately one month more would have been needed. Furthermore, when involving local policy makers or other non-international stakeholders, it would be useful to make simultaneous translations available. Lastly, finding migration skeptics that can engage in a discussion with academics, representatives from international organizations, the business community or civil servants while providing a high-quality debate is inherently difficult. Skeptics can be found among politicians but very few of them would fit the profile needed (in particular, if the debate is to be held in English). An interesting alternative could be to present research into the reasons for anti-immigration attitudes in the general public, a subject which was indeed touched upon during the debate. However, having more time to organise the event might have allowed for the possibility to target precisely this type of speaker. The last key challenge was to have the right connections with local potential participants and speakers. This was successfully overcome by the valuable support offered by our local partner, IAI, that provided us with a very good network of contacts in Rome.

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