



# Migration in the Euro-Med Space: Grim Prospect or Plausible Opportunity?

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## 1. Introduction:

The concept of motion is generally described as a change in the position of a body with time and is always relevant to a certain frame of reference. Everything in the universe is scientifically considered to be in a state of motion. This means that mobility has been, and will likely continue to be, a fact of life. Likewise, human beings have used their freedom of movement since the beginning of time as a means of survival to seek new opportunities and overcome the myriad of challenges they often face in their countries of origin or habitual residence. Both individuals & groups of people have moved within and across international borders in response to a variety of political, social, economic and environmental factors. In 2017, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) reported that the number of international migrants reached an estimate of 258 million individuals.<sup>1</sup>

As Mr. William Lacey Swing, the Director-General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) stated, “migration has become the megatrend of our time & it is not only inevitable, it is necessary.”<sup>2</sup> In an age of globalization and increased mobility, the international community has frequently been compelled to revisit the existing frameworks governing migration to allow

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<sup>1</sup>The International Migration Report. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations. New York: United Nations, 2017. Accessed May 03, 2018.  
[http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017\\_Highlights.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017_Highlights.pdf).

<sup>2</sup>Laczko, Frank, and Solveigh Hieronimus. More than Numbers: How Migration Data Can Deliver Real-life Benefits for Migrants and Governments. Working paper. Global Migration Data Analysis Center (GMDAC), The International Organization for Migration. January 24, 2018. Accessed May 04, 2018.  
[https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/more\\_than\\_numbers.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/more_than_numbers.pdf).

stakeholders to earmark resources in a way that would capitalize on possible opportunities and overcome potential challenges relating to human mobility in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This working paper aims to provide a general assessment of the current migration trends in the Euro-Med Space and propose ways to develop stakeholder engagement to enhance migration governance for both receiving and sending states in the region. Most of this paper was drafted based on a 4-day Youth Exchange Programme on Migration in the Euro-Med Space, which was organized by the Danish-Egyptian Dialogue Institute (DEDI), SwedAlex, and IOM Egypt. The programme took place in Alexandria, Egypt from 28<sup>th</sup> April to 2<sup>nd</sup> May and brought together 40 participants from both Europe and the MENA regions. During the programme, participants discussed current migration trends, foreseeable challenges and potential opportunities. Their collective reflections and propositions have been incorporated into all sections of this paper.

## 2. Legal Aspects:

In 1951, the international community gathered under the auspices of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to define the term 'migrant' as "any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is."<sup>3</sup>

However, the recognition of what constitutes migration and who counts as a "migrant" still varies according to regional and national perceptions, laws and regulations. The fact that there are different categories of migrants based on reasons for migration adds complexity to the current legal situation. Individuals can choose to migrate based on foreseeable economic opportunities or a desire to pursue advanced studies in another country. They can also be forced to migrate due to a well-founded fear of persecution or in response to environmentally-induced disasters in their area of habitual residence.

As a result, States may choose to recognize some of these categories and provide legal channels for them to access their borders through regular migration, while discarding some groups based on domestic policies & legislation rather than the IOM umbrella definition which would encompass a larger spectrum of categories.

Additionally, the International Legal Conventions governing migration were created in the post-World War II & Cold War era and were specifically designed to deal with the conditions of migration

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<sup>3</sup> "Key Migration Terms." The International Organization for Migration. Accessed May 4, 2018. <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>

during that time. This means that legal instruments such as the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons seem anachronistic, unrealistic, and do not mirror responsibilities of member states or international organizations in the current century.

Another concern is that these legal instruments do not have a burden-sharing mechanism and re-instate the concept of “non-refoulement”, which means that countries are often obliged to deal with the migrant inflows irrespective of state capacities to absorb migrant populations in accordance with state obligations and human rights.

There is also a problem of language. The vague wording in legal conventions has left much room for states to interpret definitions according to their own contexts and interests. This inconsistency contributes to the creation of discrepancies in the available data on migration trends and flows.

#### *a) Defining environmentally-induced migration:*

There is also an increasing challenge of incorporating climate-induced migration into the pre-existing definitions. Today, individuals struck by climate change displacement do not fit into any of the existing categories of refugees or asylum-seekers since they are not fleeing from persecution based on the grounds established in the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, one must cross an international border to be considered a refugee by the current international legal framework. However, most climate-induced migration results in internal displacement rather than cross-border

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<sup>4</sup> Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees  
United Nations - <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/basic/3b66c2aa10/convention-protocol-relating-status-refugees.html?query=convention+relating+to+the+status+of+refugees>

mobility.<sup>5</sup> The international community has been immersed in a heated debate on whether to create new language for climate-induced migrants or maintain the status quo since each choice would carry its own web of implications.

Finding new language for climate-induced migrants could potentially create a universal interpretation of the term, which would pave the way for heightened cooperation and policy alignment on all levels (international, regional & domestic). Additionally, it would allow the inclusion of new groups who are not yet included in the system and would leave no room for state manipulation around its legal obligations towards this category of migrants. Creating new definitions may also relieve pressure from the Geneva conventions, which may no longer be suitable to address all the challenges facing humanity today. However, the choice of creating new languages also comes with its own set of risks. For example, it may narrow down the definition of “climate refugees” in a way that may exclude some people and may add pressure on existing categories of refugees since many host countries would have to reallocate their current quota systems to accommodate spots for “climate refugees”.

On the other hand, maintaining the status quo of having no clear definition poses its own set of pros and cons. To begin with, vague definitions might allow for more inclusivity if states are willing to accommodate such migrants. It also removes labels, which may in turn, reduce stigmatizations caused by definitions. Vague definitions can provide state actors to assess situations on a case-by-case basis and allows for increased flexibility in terms of policy & decision-making if any contextual changes occur in the future. States would be able to react more quickly since they would not be hindered by an

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<sup>5</sup> McAdam, Jane. "Climate Change Displacement and International Law: Complementary Protection Standards." LEGAL AND PROTECTION POLICY RESEARCH SERIES, 03rd ser., PPLA, no. 2011 (May 2011): 12-16. Accessed May 05, 2018. <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4d95a1532.pdf>

overwhelming set of legal statutes. However, this situation would mean that there is no benchmark upon which to assess migrant cases, thereby leading to subjectivity and bias in the case assessment and management process.

### 3. Economic Aspects:

Despite the negative perceptions of the economic impact of migration that are often prevalent in public discourse, it can be argued that several economic benefits are reaped from the current migration trends. The economic consequences of migration can be felt by both sending & receiving countries.

#### *a) Receiving states:*

Several European countries are now being confronted with the reality that their population is shrinking and ageing. It is assumed that fertility rates of any given state should surpass 2.1 if a population is to replenish itself without inward migration. However, Eurostat official statistics show that the average fertility rate in the European Union (EU) currently stands at a rate of 1.6.<sup>6</sup> This means that EU countries should likely encourage migration if they plan to maintain their current economic status in the global order.

Based on the 2017 IOM Data Bulletin on Migration Trends, 72% of the current migrant population is of working age with an average age of 39 years old.<sup>7</sup> For many receiving countries, especially in Europe, migration is already becoming one of the most vital instruments in advancing national economies through labour migrants who will sustain the demand & supply of goods & services. Additionally, migrants may have a positive effect on labour productivity since they bring a

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<sup>6</sup> Cocco, Federica. "Highest Fertility Rates in Europe Still below 'replenishment Level'." Financial Times, March 28, 2018. Accessed May 06, 2018. <https://www.ft.com/content/d54e4fe8-3269-11e8-b5bf-23cb17fd1498>.

<sup>7</sup> 2018. Data Bulletin: Informing a Global Compact for Migration. Issue brief. Data Bulletin: Informing a Global Compact for Migration. Geneva: The International Organization for Migration. Available from <<https://gmdac.iom.int/data-bulletin-global-migration-trends>> Accessed 5 May 2018.

new set of skills, which could encourage locals to improve their own. Migrants encourage innovation since they come from different backgrounds and experiences.

*b) Sending states:*

The demographics in many of the developing countries are recognized for their “youth bulge.” Emigration is causing many governments in the global south to panic about the fact that they may be losing a large proportion of their younger population. However, the advantages of migration and the potential temporary return of qualified nationals far exceeds the risks associated with emigration.

Migrants significantly contribute the economic development of their Countries of Origin since they often send remittances back home and encourage Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the country. This may in turn elevate the standard of living for underdeveloped/developing communities and may potentially reduce the incentives for migration since there is more economic stability at home. Remittances reached a total worth of \$573.6 bn remittances in 2016, and 73.5% of this total was sent to low- and middle- income economies.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, migrants can become agents for development in the post-conflict phases of recovery and reconstruction. Diaspora communities have often positioned themselves as positive contributors to their countries of origin since they bring new ideas, expertise, technologies and investment. In this way, countries of origin can benefit from “brain gain” that is brought in by the acquired knowledge of diaspora communities as opposed to “brain drain” that was induced by emigration. This cycle augments innovation in developing economies and ensures that market gaps are filled.

## 4. Political Aspects:

### a) Externalizing borders (FRONTEX):

In response to what came to be known as the “European Migrant Crisis” of 2015, the European Union launched the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) to coordinate efforts for EU border management.

Additionally, the growing concerns over migration has encouraged several EU countries invoke article 28 of the EU Constitution to establish internal border controls and build fences around their state boundaries (e.g. Hungary, France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Sweden, Denmark and Norway)<sup>8</sup>. Some countries have even set up boundaries across the Mediterranean. For example, Morocco installed a five-yard high wall topped with razor wire along the border of Spain's north African enclave Melilla to stop immigrants from crossing into Europe.<sup>9</sup>

Although these walls may have temporarily kept some migrants out, they have not prevented many others from taking the journey nor have they stemmed the flows of migrants and asylum seekers into Europe. The policy of building fences cannot be a lasting solution to the challenges posed by migration. Evidence has shown that many individuals have simply climbed these walls, waiting for border patrol officers to turn a blind eye to their presence and allow them free passage. Many of the

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<sup>8</sup> Guild, Elspeth, Jean Monnet, Sergio Carrera, Lina Vosyliūtė, Kees Groenendijk, Evelien Brouwer, Didier Bigo, Julien Jeandesboz, and Médéric Martin-Mazé. "Internal Border Controls in the Schengen Area: Is Schengen Crisis-proof?" European Parliament Policy Department for Citizen's Rights and Constitutional Affairs, June 2016, 1-124. Accessed May 09, 2018. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/571356/IPOL\\_STU\(2016\)571356\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/571356/IPOL_STU(2016)571356_EN.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Govan, Fiona. "Morocco Building Wall to Halt Tide of Illegal Immigration into Europe." The Telegraph, May 12, 2014. Accessed May 09, 2018. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/morocco/10825647/Morocco-building-wall-to-halt-tide-of-illegal-immigration-into-Europe.html>

people seeking international protection are now becoming reliant on smugglers or use more dangerous routes to make the crossing, because they cannot make the journey on their own.

### *b) Rise of European populism and anti-immigrant sentiments*

There seems to be a high rise of right-wing populist political parties who are advocating for anti-immigrant policies in several countries across Europe. Parties that promote xenophobic, anti-immigrant policies have gained many supporters and are now becoming a part of governing coalitions in many countries across the continent. In September 2017, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party secured 12.6% of votes and entered the Bundestag with 94 seats. In October 2017, the Freedom Party of Austria gained 26% of total votes for the governing coalition. In January 2018, Czech President Milos won over a liberal internationalist challenger due to the-immigration policies that he was promoting.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Galston, William. "The Rise of European Populism and the Collapse of the Center-Left." Brookings Institute, 8 Mar. 2018, [www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/03/08/the-rise-of-european-populism-and-the-collapse-of-the-center-left/](http://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/03/08/the-rise-of-european-populism-and-the-collapse-of-the-center-left/)

## 5. Social Aspects:

There is heated debate in the global north regarding desirability and acceptability of migrants in host communities. Several social and political groups view the current migrant inflows as a threat to their economy, culture & security, while others view migrants as positively contributing to cultural diversity as well as social and economic innovation in their countries.

### *a) Public perceptions:*

In October 2017, the European Commission released results of an opinion poll that was carried out in 28 EU countries regarding several aspects of immigrant integration in the EU region. Although results varied at the state-level, the outcome generally showed that nearly four out of ten European citizens think that immigration is more a problem than an opportunity. Additionally, the perception of a positive or negative impact of immigrants on society was correlated with the actual share of immigrants in a country's total population. Countries with higher migrant populations (such as Sweden, UK and Luxembourg where the migrants constituted 8% of the total population) had more positive perceptions of immigrants' impact on society, while those with lower migrant populations (such as Hungary and Bulgaria where migrants constituted 2% of the total population) had negative perceptions of the impact of immigrants on society. Additionally, 56% viewed immigrants as a burden on their country's welfare system and 55% believe that they increase criminal activities.<sup>11</sup> Gallup Inc. also conducted a poll which showed that there is a strong East-West divide on the acceptance of migrants

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<sup>11</sup> "Integration of immigrants in the European Union" Special Eurobarometer 469 – Wave EB88.2 – TNS opinion & social., April 2018.

<http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/search/migrant/surveyKy/2169>

in EU societies. Central & Eastern European states had an acceptance rate of 2.77/9 while Western European states had an acceptance rate of 6.73/9.<sup>12</sup>

*b) Changing the narrative:*

As previously stated, the phenomenon of migration will likely continue to shape every aspect of one's life, be it social, political or economic. However, labels such as "migrant" and "refugee" are becoming more politically loaded and carry many negative connotations, even though this often does not reflect the reality of migration. There are many migrants and refugees who have positively contributed to the social, cultural and economic spheres of both their original and host communities. For example,

Therefore, it is becoming increasingly important to change the current narrative surrounding migration and transform the public mindset on the issue. A highly effective way to do so is to report on the success stories of migrants. Promoting success stories will have a positive effect on integration since host communities will begin to realize that migrant interaction in the economy, sports, science and culture may result in positive contributions to the host country. Additionally, success stories can often allow NGOs who to gain more visibility for impactful projects encouraging positive migrant integration, which would result in more donor funding and potential policy change on the government level.

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<sup>12</sup> "EU Most Divided in World on Acceptance of Migrants." Gallup Inc., September 6, 2017. Accessed May 08, 2018. <http://news.gallup.com/poll/217841/divided-world-acceptance-migrants.aspx>.

## 6. Conclusion

There can be no simplistic approach towards addressing the current challenges surrounding the issue of migration in the Euro-Med Space. Any practical solution will require the engagement of a variety of stakeholders, including the State, I/NGOs, media, private sector, law enforcement agencies, the recipient communities and the migrants themselves.

### *a) Analysis of stakeholder engagement*

#### *i. State:*

States must find more innovative and effective ways to enhance the process of receiving and integrating migrants into their new societies. To do so, the state must build stable institutions with stable policies that can carry out their functions irrespective of political change. Additionally, the state must train security personnel to keep a low key on violence and uphold the principle of protection from harm for all individuals within its territory.

#### *ii. Law enforcement agencies:*

Law enforcement agencies should be required to implement policies that are formulated at the international level to ensure the harmonization of migration governance. This can be done through international cooperation between law enforcement agencies (through organizations such as the INTERPOL). All agencies must work towards promoting regular migration and discouraging irregular migration through combatting crimes that facilitate such processes (e.g. corruption).

#### *iii. I/NGOs:*

INGOs can play an extremely important role of acting as a mediator to find common ground and create a hospitable environment between the government, the receiving communities and the immigrants. There is also a need for I/NGOs to cooperate with each other and plan collectively to reduce duplication of projects that work in specific aspects related to migrants while ignoring the rest. Projects should address both host and migrant concerns to ensure a comprehensive approach and encourage improved integration.

*iv. Private sector:*

The private sector can gain several benefits from migration, including the addition of increased human capital and diversity of skills and mindsets in the labour force. However, the private sector can become more engaged on several fronts. To begin with, the private sector needs to become more engaged in economic policies to set realistic quotas for labour migrants, and coordinate with the government for a more efficient legal process to issue work permits. Additionally, the private sector can play a positive role in labour integration by providing language courses, skills and capacity building trainings, and promoting cultural activities to increase cohesion and productivity.

*v. Media:*

Most media reports have frequently been focusing on the negative aspects of migration. Additionally, social media forums are gaining strong influence in shaping public perceptions on the issue even though they provide no filter and have greater emphasis on opinion rather than fact.

The media needs to find new and more reliable resources. This can be achieved through expanding and diversifying the network of reporters, and selecting news based on evidence and fact-checking. The media is also in need of generating public interest and encouraging interaction. This

could be achieved through establishing trust with audience by reporting on realities rather than sensationalizing stories and adopting a moral agenda that promotes social causes.

*vi. Immigrants*

Immigrants can also begin to practice their own self-agency by formulating community organizations to represent their demands to other stakeholders and engage in conversation with the public. Additionally, migrants can utilize their own personal experiences to integrate into NGOs working with new immigrants and enhance their services.

*vii. Receiving communities*

Citizens can have an active role in promoting migrant integration into host communities. This could be done through engaging in interactive dialogue and increasing awareness about cultural diversity. Individuals can even act as “anti-discrimination authorities” within their own networks to reduce hate speech, fear of the “other” and encourage more social cohesion.

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