

Mediterranean

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REGIONAL PROGRAM POLITICAL DIALOGUE SOUTH MEDITERRANEAN



THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN: MIGRATION STRATEGIES AND POLICIES

Compilation of findings and recommendations adopted during the regional workshop, 27-29 May 2016, Antalya

For two years, European countries, and Germany in particular, have experienced a sudden increase in the influx of refugees, in particular Syria as a direct consequence of the Syrian civil war. Yet, the countries of the south-ern and eastern Mediterranean have faced the issue of a growing influx of refugees for a significantly longer time. First considered being countries of transit, countries of the Mediterranean Basin have rarely if ever been only countries of transit, but often times turned into countries of destination and/or asylum. They are facing the challenge to manage migration so that it maximizes the benefits for the migrants and minimizes the negative effects on the countries' economic, social and security situation. These countries are at very different stages of introducing new migration policies, laws and institutions, and further developing their cooperation with inter-national actors. Yet, most importantly, countries in the Mediterranean basin so far have been lacking effective mechanisms for coordination and co-operation of practices and policies.

Therefore, what are the exact challenges the transit countries in the Mediterranean basin face? Do they see themselves as countries of transit or destination? How have these countries responded to the influx of refugees so far? What strategies have they developed to cope with the stream of migrants? What consequences do these countries face in terms of their own political, economic and social make-up?

To address these questions, the Regional Program South Mediterranean of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung conducted a two-days workshop on the perception and role of the states of the southern Mediterranean in the migration crisis. The workshop brought together international experts from different sectors (academics, representatives working for different governments, and NGO workers) from countries of the Mediterranean and Germany to identify the key themes in the migration crisis from a Mediterranean perspective. It was the first event to launch a long-term dialogue program with the aim to establish mechanisms of regular contact between practitioners and experts working on migration policies in transit and destination countries, i.e. Mediterranean countries and the EU, in order to establish a network for cooperation and coordination.

The following report summarises the main themes discussed during the workshop and finishes with relevant conclusions and recommendations for further approaches on how to deal with the high influx of migrants into the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean and Europe.

Implications of the refugee crisis for transit and destination countries

About 80 per cent of forced migrants arrive in other developing countries, most often neighbours to their countries of origin. This puts an additional stress on the already weak infrastructures in countries like Lebanon and Jordan that have been effectively dealing with multiple waves of refugees over the past half-decade, in particular Palestinians and Iraqis. But the current increase of refugee waves obstructs a long-term trend of increasing refugee influx to other countries of the Mediterranean as well, such as Turkey, Italy and Greece. Although refugees from Syria are currently the largest group to arrive, refugees from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, but also Eritrea and Nigeria are among pose the second-largest group to arrive.

The current migration flows are very well documented and the existing data could be used effectively to have a more accurate idea of the state of the refugee and migration flows. However, this data is often interpreted out of context, especially to fuel populist rhetoric. Yet, there is de facto a significant amount of expertise in the southern Mediterranean in dealing with refugees that EU countries should consider when designing measures to deal with the influx of refugees.

The workshop participants identified in their presentations three main sectors in which migration flows impact on the current situation in the transit and destination countries and pose new challenges, i.e. the realms of the economy, the society, and the security sector.

I Economic implications of the increased influx of refugees

The economic impact of the influx of refugees is particularly felt by countries with an already weak infrastructure. Lebanon, for example, has registered an economic loss of about US\$15 million since the start of the war in Syria, as well as a fast growing unemployment rate (25 per cent in 2014 of which 65 per cent were youth). The influx of refugees has caused a sudden large-scale imbalance in supply and demand of labour. Recent recession in addition to forced migration has caused an excess in supply of labour. The integration of refugees in the labour market has been a main concern for countries in the eastern Mediterranean. Yet, labour market integration requires clarity in procedures and regulations (policies) in order to be successful, and a net job growth is essentially needed to accommodate the surplus of labour force. This obliges governments to be clear in their aims on whether to create jobs as opposed to income-generating opportunities. This is particularly significant since a high percentage of informal and illegal employment of refugees can be observed in the countries of the southern Mediterranean, e.g. up to half a million in Turkey. At the same, unemployment rates in the south of Turkey where most Syrian refugees live are particularly high. In order to address the need for economic integration, Syrians can seek for work anywhere in the country (and then need to get registered in the city where they work). Companies are allowed to employ up to 10 per cent of Syrians in their workforce. The cap of 10 per cent is supposed to ensure that the local labour market is not upset. Problematic is however the unknown educational background of many of the refugees. Thus, vocational training centres are required to

equip Syrian refugees for the needs of the labour market in Turkey or other host countries, similar to the program that has been implemented in Germany. At the same time, certain centres with a high concentration of a Syrian refugee population has witnessed a high entrepreneurial activity among Syrians, without the active engagement of the government (e.g. Mersin, Batay). It would be useful to identify why this is the case in these areas and what good practices can be identified in order to learn from them and apply them elsewhere. In sum, the main difficulty that the countries of the Mediterranean basin face, is the necessity to turn short-term humanitarian approaches into long-term development.

II Social implications for refugees and local populations

In general, countries in the eastern Mediterranean face very similar issues like EU countries and Germany when it comes to the social integration of refugees, in particular with regard to housing, education and the perception of the local population. Social implications exist for both, the refugee population and the population of the host countries. Refugee populations are particularly vulnerable. In countries like Turkey and Lebanon, a rise in child marriages, child labour, prostitution (including minors) and street children has been observed, as well as a growing infant mortality. But they are also the target of exploitation due to a lack of legal working opportunities and a lack of information. Many refugees do not know what they are eligible for and face language barriers in the host countries (Turkey and EU member states). The Turkish government has set up temporary education centres in order to address the issue of 'a lost generation' and provide refugee children with primary and secondary education.

However, apart from providing refugees with social and economic security, integration is a key issue. A lack of interaction between migrants and local populations nurtures alienation and xenophobia. Thus, it is necessary to create the idea that both groups are members of the same community. In doing so, there need to be regular excuses, incentives and possibilities for greater interaction between migrants and the local population. That means that physical space and location matter when it comes to housing but also the location of businesses for migrants. Hence, the concentration of refugees in few places should be limited, e.g. through a diversification from urban to rural areas, as has been attempted in Germany.

III Security and regional/international implications

In terms of security and international implications for the countries of the Mediterranean, the EU plays a prominent role. So far, politics failed to collaborate effectively north and south of the Mediterranean basin. Similar to the financial and security crises that the EU faces, a lack of collective action hampers an effective regional response to the challenges of the refugee crisis. This is partly due to weak institutions that deal with migration and asylum policies on EU level. Furthermore, the EU is unable to impose its decisions on its member states that often times have conflicting interests with the EU when it comes to migration and asylum policies. The countries of the Mediterranean basin demand more transparency from the EU in its plans and actions regarding the refugee crisis, but also demand that the EU exerts more pressure on its member states to take on more refugees (i.e. broaden the 'coalition of the willing'). A positive role of the EU is furthermore necessary to mitigate the stress on the Schengen contract. In the aftermath of the attacks in Paris and Brussels, open borders are seen as a potential security risk. Yet, a growing securitisation in Europe would make effective strategies to address the refugee crisis again more difficult and most likely increase the burden on the countries of the Mediterranean basin. At the same time, refugees without any prospects are an easy target for extremist groups such as the so-called Islamic State (IS). It is crucial not to lose sight of the human perspective when addressing current security issues, and develop mechanisms that ensure the security of the refugees in as much as the security of the host countries.

With regard to transit and host countries, the situation in Libya is of particular concern. Under the Gaddafi regime, the country attracted a number of refugees from sub-Saharan Africa who were smuggled through the country to the Mediterranean coast. Due to an 'agreement' between the Gaddafi regime and the EU, many of

the refugees were caught and held in refugee camps. Yet, since the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011 and the rapid decline of the security situation in Libya, the absence of any state oversight makes it easy for smugglers to channel refugees through the country and to various destinations at Libya's coastline from where small boats are sent northwards. Smuggling routes have long been existing in Libya and neighbouring countries, partly facilitated through ethnic groups that live on both sides of the border. Furthermore, criminal gangs involved in drug and weapons trafficking also engage in the trafficking of people, and gaining significant amounts of money that fuel the Libyan civil war further. The current warring governments in Libya take the refugee-issue hostage when negotiating with the EU about their recognition. Given the collapse of state institutions in Libya, the absence of a central government recognised by all parties in Libya, the intense conflict between warring factions, and the growing presence of the IS, it is likely that refugee streams from Libya will still increase, turning it into a typical transit-country with easy access for smugglers. Yet, the lack of any state-oversight or control makes it unlikely that Libya will any time soon also play the role of a destination country.

Particularly with regard to the precarious security situation in Libya, that has the potential to threaten the stability of neighbouring countries such as Tunisia and Algeria, regional cooperation in terms of security issues would be extremely important. Unfortunately, so far there have not been any effective voices and forums that call for and enable such cooperation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The workshop showed that the main challenges of the refugee flows for the countries of the Mediterranean basin are similar to those EU countries experience, yet the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean have been grappling with these challenges for much longer and also to a larger extent. The main issues are economic pressures on already weak infrastructures, a meaningful integration of refugees on a social and economic level, in particular with regard to a successful dealing with the excess supply of labour forces in the low-skilled sector. Governments need to accommodate the concerns of the local population, as well as those of the refugee communities that often times do not receive more than the bare minimum of aid.

Some initiatives such as training centres for refugees in Turkey or Germany seem to have been rather successful, similar to schools for Syrian children in Turkey, in which Syrian teachers are employed. Yet, all countries lack the provision of spaces in which refugees and host population encounter each other on a frequent basis and thus support the social integration. There is no doubt that Syrians will not be able to return to their country in the near future and thus, comprehensive resettling plans based on an agreement between the EU and the countries of the Mediterranean basin are needed. This would facilitate more pro-active approaches that are needed to comprehensively address the above-mentioned challenges on a long term basis. A closer cooperation would also facilitate the exchange of experiences and 'lessons learned' between the different countries.

- Regular meetings of representatives from the EU and the countries of the Mediterranean would create a standing forum in which the developments in the countries can be monitored and regularly compared.
- Such a standing forum could create permanent working groups, e.g. on the issues of the economy, security issues, and social integration to develop programs that gear into each other. Whilst local and national conditions need to be taken into consideration, a supra-regional coordination would ensure equal standards for refugees in the different host countries. It would furthermore contribute to creating a sense of co-ownership between the EU and the Mediterranean countries as equal partners.
- Apart from a regional cooperation between the EU and the countries of the Mediterranean basin, the region of the southern and eastern Mediterranean needs a comprehensive regional plan that outlines how the countries of the region will cope with the refugee streams in the mid-term future. This

regards the need for clear, concise and comprehensive strategies on how to coordinate common actions and policy-decisions in order to alleviate the burden on each country and benefit from each other's experiences and practices, so as to create meaningful partnerships between the countries of the region.

- Think-tanks that are already cooperating should be better included in policy advising. They can help to create regular meetings and forums for exchange between politicians, academics and practitioners to allow for pooling expertise on the topics of refugees and migration.
- The above-mentioned forums or working groups would also contribute to a much-needed closer coordination and cooperation of NGOs, INGOs, and governments. This should allow for a better monitoring of aid flows, and stress for greater accountability of both state and non-state agencies in order to limit the risks of corruption.
- Civil society actors in different countries have taken valuable initiatives without any governmental encouragement. There should be some form of evaluation of these often times very effective initiatives to enable their reproduction in other regions or countries.
- There is a need for awareness raising among the host populations about the reality of the refugee communities and the reasons for why these people had to flee their home countries. Non-political actors from the business sector and the civil society should be engaged in these awareness raising campaigns. Furthermore, more incentives and opportunities for the encounter between refugees and host populations on a local basis should be created. Again, think tanks can play a role here in facilitating the cooperation and the exchange of experiences between different initiatives and NGOs. Workshops could offer a platform for actors already involved in such initiatives to present their work, get feedback from NGOs that might contribute insights and 'lessons learned' from a meta-level, and encourage others to engage in similar projects.



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