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The European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) has carried out six “Euromed Surveys” so far based on a broad sample of policy-makers and experts with the objective of covering the main issues on the political agenda of the region and monitoring the progress in Euro-Mediterranean perceptions and policies. After dedicating last year’s Survey to reviewing the European Neighbourhood Policy, the IEMed decided to dedicate this year’s to the management of human movements and migrations in the Mediterranean area. This Survey is part of a determined and consistent effort that the IEMed has made over the last few years with the objective of analysing and facilitating the understanding of the human movements in the Mediterranean and their impact on Euro-Mediterranean relations through a number of activities and publications. While doing so, the IEMed has not only tried to decode the policy response of the European Union but has also insisted again and again on the human dimension of the crisis, on the fact that it was not the EU but rather some Southern Mediterranean countries that were bearing the biggest burden and, finally, that enhanced Euro-Mediterranean cooperation is absolutely essential to deal with this situation.

The 7th Euromed Survey was conducted among 5,900 experts and actors from the 43 countries that are members of the Union for the Mediterranean. We received 807 responses, which constitutes a representative sample of this expert community. In addition to the descriptive report of the results and the annexes that set out the results in a comprehensive and visual manner, this publication also gives some space to more in-depth analyses of a few strategic issues related to the management of human movements and migrations. The objective of the “qualitative analysis” written by experts is to offer keys to better understand some of the main issues at stake.

The Survey was conducted in summer 2016, after the Mediterranean witnessed the most important displacement of people since the Second World War. This situation resulted mainly from the outbreak of the war in Syria and the ensuing destabilisation of the region. In Syria, 4.8 million people¹ left the country and are now refugees, mostly in neighbouring countries. At the same time, according to UNHCR data,² almost 1 million refugees asked for asylum in the EU. In the Mediterranean, sea crossings increased to an unprecedented number. After initial solidarity signals towards refugees, an intense debate followed on the ability of EU governments to cope with this crisis and provide effective protection to refugees, both in destination and transit countries. To this situation, the destabilisation of Libya brought about an increase in migratory flows from Sub-Saharan Africa, which overlapped with refugees fleeing war in African and Middle East countries. These flows were mainly concentrated on the Central Mediterranean route. The nature of these flows, mixing asylum seekers escaping wars and irregular migrants both following the same routes, challenged the existing regional framework of programmes, policies and cooperation mechanisms.

The Euromed Survey was designed to capture all these elements. The questionnaire is structured around four main groups of questions. First, it tackles the general perception of the migration and refugee situation in the Mediterranean. In a second part, it focuses on the EU’s challenges, policies and instruments, before turning to the specific situation of Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries. The last group of questions relates to bilateral, regional and international cooperation mechanisms.

1. UNHCR. Syria Regional Refugee Response. Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal. Retrieved from <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

2. UNHCR. Refugees/Migrants Response - Mediterranean. Retrieved from <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

Overall, results very much illustrate the Euro-Mediterranean common dimension of the “refugee crisis” and the inter-dependency of policy responses. The responses do not systematically follow Northern vs. Southern Mediterranean patterns and show how countries in both the North and South of the Mediterranean may face similar challenges. Results also call for enhanced Euro-Mediterranean cooperation on migration as the performance of current mechanisms is assessed as insufficient by respondents.

On the General Migration and Refugee Situation in the Euro-Mediterranean Region

The first batch of questions seeks to capture the perception of respondents on the causes and consequences of the migration and refugee situation as well as the assessment of the policy responses implemented so far.

In general, destabilisation following conflicts and their regional impact are perceived as the two main explicative elements of the present migration and refugee situation. The Western, Central and Eastern Mediterranean are differently affected by refugee or migratory flows. The nearer to the conflict areas, the more important refugee flows are. Thus, armed conflicts in the region will be the most decisive factors shaping patterns along the Eastern route over the next ten years and to some extent also the central corridor, according to the respondents. More structural factors such as the socioeconomic situation in the source countries will be likely to affect the Western route. Climate change and demographic transition do not seem to be among the top concerns of respondents.

Perceptions about how specific countries are affected by different kinds of human movements vary depending on their position in the human movement geography. However, there is no clear dividing line in terms of response patterns between Northern Mediterranean countries on the one hand and Southern/Southeast Mediterranean countries on the other. For instance, responses from Italian respondents showed similar patterns as responses from Maghrebian respondents when identifying transit migrations to a more significant extent than respondents from Jordan or Lebanon as a category of movements affecting them.

Results also shed some light on the perceptions of policy responses. Overall, there is limited enthusiasm among the respondents about the policy response deployed by various stakeholders, although respondents tend to be less critical of major destination countries, both North and South of the Mediterranean, than with transit countries. When assessing the main drivers conditioning the policy responses, respondents tend to identify the government’s capacity and to some extent human considerations as the main drivers in the case of the former and short-term political and electoral considerations in the case of the latter.³

3. Since the fieldwork of the Survey was carried out during 2016, the electoral cycles of 2017 could alter these results.

A rather interesting element that appears in this section is that results also show a growing concern with the potential instability that the marginalisation of refugee communities may cause. This is linked to some of the weaknesses detected in the international refugee system which, in addition to ensuring the effective protection of refugees, should also somehow factor in local communities in receiving countries, particularly those in neighbouring areas of the conflict countries.

On Specific Challenges in the EU and in Southern and Southeast Mediterranean Countries

The second and third blocks of the Survey aimed to capture respondents' assessments of both instruments and challenges of the European Union and Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries, respectively.

As far as the EU is concerned, the evaluation of the management of the refugee and migratory flows by the respondents is rather negative. Two main conclusions can be drawn from the results. First, the poor management of the migration and refugee situation since 2014 is mainly due to unilateral decisions taken by EU member states, rather than by EU institutions. The conditions in which Schengen internal controls have been reintroduced and the tendency to externalise the border controls to third countries are particularly highlighted. Second, and as a logical consequence of the first, it is crucial to improve the coordination between the European Commission and the member states. This is clearly illustrated in the case of the Temporary EU Relocation System, whereby respondents consider that the EU member states should better share and redistribute the “burden” among themselves. Existing instruments designed by the EU to better manage refugees and asylum should be better used and prioritised, according to respondents. While doing so, addressing the root causes of irregular migration in origin countries and further developing legal migration schemes are identified as important priorities.

As far as the policy agenda of Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries is concerned, the main element to prioritise is the strengthening of the national protection capacities towards refugees. The descriptive report also identifies interesting results along geographical lines. For example, when asked to share their view about their own country, respondents from Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries seem to be more concerned with challenges related to emigration than the Survey mean. In turn, it seems that European respondents are more concerned with the socioeconomic integration of refugees in the Southern and Southeast Mediterranean host countries than respondents from the Southern and Southeast Mediterranean. Echoing results obtained elsewhere in the Survey, Jordanian and Lebanese respondents also believe that the support for host community members should be the key priority for their countries.

Bilateral, Regional and International Cooperation

The fourth block of the Survey was aimed at capturing respondents' views on the bilateral, regional and international mechanisms of cooperation on migratory issues in the Mediterranean. In general terms, the majority of respondents do not find that the established dialogues and cooperation frameworks in the field of migration are effective.

In relative terms, though, a majority of respondents consider that the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is the most useful regional policy framework to address migration-related challenges, although the ENP could be better connected to the overall migration architecture of the EU and be used as a framework for more effectively addressing the primary causes of migrations.

A number of respondents refer to the need to establish a truly Euro-Mediterranean mechanism of cooperation to deal with migration and human movements. The Union for the Mediterranean is mentioned in this respect.

Invited to evaluate the "EU-Turkey deal", a majority of respondents do not think its underlying rationale and its main components are adequate. In particular, the provision about the return of all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands receives very limited support, in particular among the respondents from Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries. A certain degree of scepticism about the EU "Emergency Trust Fund for Africa" also comes to the fore, in particular among EU-28 respondents, who are more critical than respondents from Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries.