

“Dying to Make it to (and in) Europe” Managing Migration in a Mediterranean Context

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Migration and the Mediterranean have more in common than just their initial letter. Some years ago, during excavations at Antis, a site in southern Sardinia, not far from where, since 2007, boats with irregular migrants, mostly young Algerians, have begun to arrive, archaeologists found a statue of the god “Sardus Pater.” It was later dated to the 9th century B.C.. According to legend, this god, so revered that even later civilizations kept worshipping him, had also arrived from North Africa. Thus the latest route of irregular migration in the Mediterranean might well be one of its oldest. In order to grasp and prepare for what is happening today it is indeed important to understand the history of a region with its thousands of years of conflicts, interaction and cultural exchanges.

Boats almost sinking under the weight of their human cargo en route to Europe make excellent material for press photographs and TV spots. These sad pictures fuel both fear and compassion but they only allow a very limited insight into the dramas unfolding around migration and the Mediterranean.

It is due as much to policies and conditions in the European destination countries as to push factors in the states of origin in Africa, Asia and Latin America that irregular migration is the main channel into Europe. And while the majority of these irregulars do not disembark on Lampedusa, Sicily, the Aegean Islands or the Canaries, these are the routes that take the largest toll in terms of human lives lost.

The large majority of migrants in an irregular situation actually arrive as tourists, overstay their visa or use

forged documents. Some then live on the margins of economies and societies that offer just enough monetary or non-monetary benefits to survive. Many others, however, do find remunerated employment and manage to send money to their families back home. Channelling migration into legal avenues would thus appear to be the logical complement to combating smuggling, illegal stay and work in the underground economy.

Cooperation between South and North has indeed started to open opportunities. Senegal, Morocco, some Latin American countries and Spain are experimenting successfully with such schemes while Italy, Egypt, Tunisia and Sri Lanka have collected experience with pilot projects. This opening of regular channels for economic migration is a promising approach. It is nevertheless seriously challenged by push factors (among them: demography, economics, family links, networks, peer pressure as well as humanitarian concerns and persecution) that go beyond even the most generous reception arrangements.

A growing and very preoccupying phenomenon within the irregular migrant population directed at Europe, is the number of unaccompanied minors undertaking the perilous journey. Either pushed by their families or departing of their own accord, many face realities of exploitation and discrimination due to their dual vulnerability, as minors and as migrants.

Greece, Italy and Spain in particular experience this phenomenon and besides the high social cost, the economic repercussions for host communities can be serious. Italy reports expenses exceeding 200 million euros for 2007 for the care of more than 7,000 minors. Collaboration with origin countries and families is often difficult. Migrants try to hide their identities; families expect at least to be relieved of the financial burden and often for the youngsters to obtain a free

¹ This contribution reflects the personal view of the author and not necessarily those of the International Organization for Migration.

education or to support them through remittances. Thus and in spite of the often wide gap between the expected and real outcome of this migration effort, most attempts to return the minors to their families fail. This issue in particular risks impacting negatively on overall promising developments in international cooperation on migration management around the Mediterranean. A comprehensive and balanced approach to migration requires policies and measures addressing a broad range of challenges and opportunities including regular and irregular migration, human rights of migrants, migration and development, inter-state dialogue and cooperation, integration and return.

It is necessary to include all relevant players at both the national and international levels. At the national level, that would involve all governmental Ministries whose work directly or indirectly involves or impacts migration – such as justice and home affairs, labour, trade and development. The business community, trade unions and civil society are key voices that need to be heard at grassroots levels. At the international level, organizations dealing with issues such as development, labour, human rights, trade, health and crime prevention need to be involved. Cooperation is key to bridging coherence gaps and achieving effective migration management.

At the global level, dialogue on migration has experienced some progress. IOM's International Dialogue on Migration brings together more than 130 states and partner organizations to share experiences and perspectives and create better understanding and cooperation in the management of migration. The UN has decided to make International Migration and Development a yearly agenda item, Belgium has hosted the first meeting of a global intergovernmental dialogue in Brussels. The Philippines and Greece have invited this forum to their capitals for 2008 and 2009. IOM is actively involved in promoting regional cooperation on migration including through the initiation and facilitation of regional dialogues. Regional and sub-regional processes, such as the 5+5 Dialogue on Migration in the Western Mediterranean can provide forums for informal contacts, exchange of information, analysis of migration-related topics and capacity building in the region.

Africa-Europe debates at the governmental level have recently benefitted from the Rabat conference as well as African Union/European Union meetings in Libya and Portugal. These conferences have provided useful meeting points to discuss Africa/Europe migration issues, as does the "Across Sahara" project that promotes dialogue and technical cooperation

between Italy, Libya and Niger. An IOM-led multi-regional dialogue between Africa, the Maghreb and Europe on irregular migration has helped establish co-operation at the technical level.

After the events of 9/11 and in light of a sustained global terrorist threat, security concerns are necessarily high on national and international agendas, including in the context of the movement of people. In Europe and internationally, security remains one of the central considerations in migration management. While security is a necessary dimension of migration management it must however not become the principal focus of the debate – although there are close links between cross-border mobility and security. Irregular migration poses a threat to security and stability in a variety of ways:

- In its most corrosive forms of smuggling and trafficking, it is linked to transnational organized crime. Entry of migrants in an irregular manner undermines the capacity of states to ensure public order; trafficking and smuggling on a large scale can corrupt and undermine the institutions of the state. IOM estimates that some 200,000 people are trafficked into and within Europe every year, the majority of them women and girls for sexual exploitation.
- Moreover, irregular migration fuels corruption, informal economies and undermines social cohesion, which, at worst, may provoke xenophobia and racism.

The challenge that States face is how to protect society and reduce irregular migration without stifling legitimate and needed movement and without imposing serious constraints on personal rights and liberties.

Besides the growing challenge of integration and the necessary dialogue across diverse cultures, a key issue to understand the underlying issues remains demographics – both in origin and destination societies; incidentally a distinction that is getting increasingly blurred. Demographic trends, increasing global economic integration and the gap in income levels between the developed and developing worlds ensure that migration to Europe will continue. Freedom, security and justice in the EU and its neighbouring countries and the aim of prosperity and stability in the region require that mobility will not take the form of more unregulated migration, with its associated adverse effects and security challenges, but will instead flow into safe, orderly, humane and productive avenues.

Among the issues that merit more profound understanding is the burden that origin and transit states face as a result of heavy migration pressures and flows. Very often these ill-equipped countries apprehend or readmit considerable numbers of irregular migrants en route to Europe. The same holds true for Eastern and Central European countries. There the heaviest burden of irregular migrants seeking to enter the EU is experienced by the countries on the Western Border of the Commonwealth of Independent States-CIS (Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova). Turkey too remains a major transit and destination country.

The influx of irregular migrants puts a considerable strain on the often under-resourced social and welfare services of transit countries when irregular migrants temporarily settle there while trying to reach their destination. Transit states often do not have the capacity to send these migrants back to their countries of origin or to accommodate them. In addition, irregular migrants typically take up informal jobs while in transit, fuelling growth of the informal economy – and corruption.

To respond more adequately to these new challenges the organization has recently opened offices in Libya, and on the islands of Sicily and Lampedusa. One of the projects implemented by IOM in Libya provides support to the Libyan government in responding to the growing challenges of increasing irregular and transit migration in a humane manner, including through bringing reception conditions available to irregular migrants up to international standards and offering such migrants voluntary return possibilities. By April 2008 more than 2,200 migrants have thus been assisted to return.

Effective migration management requires capacity building to help place all states on a more equal footing. Due to the complexity of migration management, capacity building must cover a range of intercrossing activities and sectors of policy making. Lack of migration management capacity in some countries can undermine the ability of the whole region to deal effectively with issues related to the movement of people. Therefore a partnership between countries with different levels of capacity is essential. While the EU plays a prominent role in providing financial and technical assistance (through such programmes as AENEAS, TACIS, CARDS, MEDA, AGIS and ARGO) more is needed to partner countries in developing their migration management capacities. While we do have many tools and forums at our disposal, all is not well when it comes to managing international migration in a humane and efficient manner. The deserts of Africa and the shores of the Mediterranean already hold too many graves of the

often anonymous migrants who did not make it. Estimates speak of thousands of victims in recent years. As some of the survivors relate upon arrival in Lampedusa where IOM, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees-UNHCR and the Italian Red Cross have established a permanent presence, many of them were unaware of the real risks linked to irregular migration or the (few) actual legal migration opportunities that their smugglers have no interest in promoting. Information – credible, from a neutral source, based on facts – is a key element in managing migration and preventing hardship. Still there is occasional reluctance from policy makers in origin countries to allow these realities to be presented to their young people when they can offer little in the way of alternatives. In the medium or long term, only sustainable development will reduce pressures to a level where migration becomes one option for bettering one's economic prospects among several.

Migration also brings challenges to the societies where migrants have managed to arrive; among them are social tension, conflicted identity and the alienation caused by inadequate integration. With the numbers of migrants – and countries affected by migration – growing, integration has become a major focus for policy makers at all levels. In Europe we have seen different models succeed – or sometimes fail. Here too much more will have to be invested in order to avoid the centrifugal forces brought by many diverse nationalities, religions and cultures becoming stronger than the cohesion that still characterizes most European societies.

In the past, migratory trends were dominated by one-time, unidirectional movement resulting in permanent settlement in countries of destination. As a result, countries of destination traditionally focused on the integration of migrants with a view to putting them on the path to nationality. For this reason, some countries considered (and continue to consider) integration only in these terms.

Though permanent and long-term migration remains significant, international migration today is increasingly temporary, circular and multi-directional. As temporary and circular migration increases, more countries are seeing this phenomenon as a policy priority. Today, a typical migrant may well be born in one country, obtain an education in another, live part of their professional life in another, retire in yet another and pick up citizenship in any of these locations.

At each stage, migrants establish roots, participate in community life, and leave a lasting imprint on the communities and persons with whom they have come

in contact and who are themselves changed by the experience. This form of migration creates the possibility of having multiple identities and different notions of belonging (trans-nationalism).

This changed sense of affiliation has direct implications for governmental policies in such areas as multiple nationality and voting rights for non-resident nationals, mostly at local level. While in the past, countries of destination traditionally focused on integrationist policies with a view to putting migrants on the path to nationality, some governments of countries of origin are now moving in the direction of facilitating multiple affiliations for the benefits these bring to investment and job creation in the country of origin (using remittances as a potential leverage with appropriate incentives) and links to migration and development.

Successful integration helps migrants become active members in the economic, social, cultural and political life of host states. This, in turn, can also be beneficial for their countries of origin, because migrants can then more easily mobilize their human and financial capital to support the development process. The relationship of migrants with the host society can be seen as taking place along a spectrum ranging from:

- Very little interaction where migrants are essentially segregated or excluded or segregate themselves from the society in which they live and work;
- An expectation that migrants shed their cultural identity by assimilating into the mainstream culture;
- Encouragement to migrants to take on a new national identity;
- Promotion of the retention and development of migrant cultures and languages in a multicultural context;
- The development of transnational and dual or multiple identities where migrants live in, have a sense of belonging to, and participate effectively in two or more societies, including those of destination and origin countries.

Key questions for reflection and discussion should include:

- What does it mean to be successfully integrated today?
- What level of integration is required for each category or type of migrant?
- What are the implications for the identity of a country or a society?

- What are the implications for government policies, for example, regarding language and access to social services, education, and health care?
- What should the core values of each society be and through what process or processes could they be better defined?
- Should diversity and transnational identity be viewed as inherent values to be promoted, or simply as realities that cannot be ignored, and how can they be harnessed to benefit communities in both host and origin countries?

While the transnational model is gaining relevance as a consequence of globalization and the interconnectedness it brings, other societies are opting for more demanding adaptation to the dominant culture. Even where migration is temporary, a certain level of integration is nonetheless necessary to ensure that the temporary stay is as productive and beneficial as possible. Where migrants have chosen a host society but not been chosen by it (i.e. either entered without permission or overstayed a lawful entry), questions of integration nonetheless are important for social stability, security and national identity. While migrants in an irregular situation are integrated *de facto* in some cases, particularly if they are employed and speak the local language, some countries have adopted measures enabling certain groups of irregular migrants to regularize their status, in recognition of their contribution to the national economy, or, conversely, to prevent their further exploitation and marginalization, and promote their fuller integration.

The consequences of failed economic integration of migrants are all too evident. Persistent unemployment among many second and third generation migrants, increasing alienation, isolation and frustration, often fuelled by a combination of relative poverty, limited educational opportunities and the absence of supportive networks, can result in social tension and disturbances. These issues often affect the local population in poorer and more deprived communities and not just migrants, and therefore require comprehensive economic and social strategies, involving governments at all levels as well as a wide range of other stakeholders, such as employers, local communities and civil society organizations. Acceptance of and respect for diversity is crucial and concerted efforts are required to create relationships between culturally distinct communities of migrants and nationals with a view to building social cohesion and harmony. Schools and the media have particularly important roles to play in promoting tolerance and mutual acceptance.

Migration can alter the cultural composition and economic landscape of whole regions, cities and communities in host countries, due to population increases or to the particular practices, skills sets and beliefs of individual migrants. Migrants and migration can bring vibrancy, increased productivity, cultural richness and diversity. But cultural and religious differences between migrants and the host society can also bring into focus competing values such as freedom of expression and freedom of religion and can

result in intolerance, discrimination and xenophobia. Here as well the Mediterranean region continues to experience worrying manifestations, and politicians are at risk of taking seemingly easy approaches in reaction to immediate concerns rather than working towards long-term solutions. In the long term, however, there is no other peaceful option than dialogue and work. The goal remains that migration and migrants as well as the societies they reach, affirm their values of modern, open societies.

1st EURO-MEDITERRANEAN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON MIGRATION (ALGARVE)

On 18th and 19th November 2007, the 1st Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Migration was held in the Algarve. The agreement approved embraces the principles and objectives established in previous forums, such as the 8th and 9th Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, held in Tampere and Lisbon in 2006 and 2007 respectively, and that which resulted in the approval of the 1995 Barcelona Declaration. The agreement also recognises the contributions made by different international initiatives on migration and development, such as the Euro-African Ministerial Conference in Rabat and the EU-Africa Ministerial Conference in Tripoli, held in 2006, and the United Nations Dialogue in New York, also in 2006.

In the text, the group of ministers of the different states of the European Union and the southern Mediterranean established as a fundamental principle the recognition of the economic and social benefits that regular immigration can mean both for the countries of origin and the transit and host countries. Moreover, the agreement notes the need to strengthen joint management with shared responsibility and from a more global and balanced approach. As more specific objectives, the text highlights the need to speed up the bureaucracy of the migration process and promote regular immigration within the Euro-Mediterranean region bearing in mind the respective labour markets. The agreement recognises that in this process the protection of human rights of migrants is fundamental and points out the importance of aspects such as family reunification and social integration based on the participation of immigrants in civil, economic and cultural life of the receiving countries. In addition, the text makes clear the concern of the states over illegal immigration and notes the need to fight against this phenomenon from a multidimensional approach of strengthened cooperation.

To achieve these principles and objectives, the ministers committed themselves to implementing different specific measures and actions, which they divided into the following fields of work: legal migration; migration and development; illegal migration; funding and implementation structure; and monitoring. On the first point, the text reflects the commitment to promoting opportunities of regular migration, understanding that it is globally positive and has a positive impact on development, as long as one bears in mind the needs of the countries of origin, especially in matters such as the brain drain. The text covers different projects, such as the establishment of a taskforce dedicated to aspects related to the labour market, which would include representatives of all the Euro-Mediterranean partners and relevant social actors, and would be responsible for carrying out an explorative technical study on the needs of the migrant workforce. Other projects are the promotion of training courses for migrant workers to improve their skills, and vocational training and language courses which would be undertaken before

departure. The commitment to holding informative campaigns aimed at potential emigrants on regular migration and the specific work opportunities in the receiving countries was also established, along with that of promoting activities for recent arrivals, including information on their rights and the importance of respecting values and national legislation.

With respect to the field of migration and development, the ministers committed to working on the underlying causes of migration, mainly poverty, unemployment, and unequal development. There was a particular commitment to promoting foreign direct investment to generate employment, establish mechanisms to facilitate transfer of remittances of immigrants and micro-credit opportunities. To achieve these objectives, the following projects will be undertaken: a seminar on the transfer of funds and micro-credit opportunities, in which all parties involved will participate; the construction of a Euro-Mediterranean website to disseminate information on remittances and the respective transfer procedures, increasing transparency and thus competence; and, lastly, the study of the possibilities of financial support for regular immigrants resident in Europe to co-fund their investment projects in the country of origin.

With respect to irregular immigration, the Euro-Mediterranean partners committed themselves to promoting cooperation and capacity building through exchange of experiences, good practices and regular training, in relation to the control of migration flows on the borders and returns and readmissions. To this end, several projects will be carried out aimed at improving security standards in travel documents of the member states to strengthen confidence in their use while training courses will be promoted for the transit countries on aspects such as detection of false identity and travel documents, the outward flows and the strengthening of the relation between the fight against irregular immigration and respect for international instruments. The agreement envisages that funding of all these projects will be guaranteed through the institutional resources available for the support of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, other funding instruments of the European Union and the contributions of the member states who participate in the projects. Lastly, the ministers made a commitment to maintaining regular meetings between the Euro-Mediterranean partners, through the establishment of taskforces at the level of senior experts and officials to implement all the actions and supervise their progress.

For further information:

Ministerial Conclusions of the 1st Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Migration:

www.eu2007.pt/UE/vEN/Noticias_Documentos/20071119Conclusoesuromed.htm