

# The Mediterranean challenge within a world of humanitarian crises

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**While the high number of migrants and refugees arriving in Europe in 2015 has increased pressures and tensions, this is not a crisis beyond the capability of Europe to manage together as a Union. We need bold, collective thinking and action to develop a truly comprehensive approach.**

There are currently some 60 million people in the world who have been displaced by persecution, war, conflict or disaster – the most we have seen in the post-World War II era. However, whereas at that time weary and war-torn Europe was a place to turn away from and leave behind, it is now at the receiving end of displacement.

Europe's neighbours to the south and the east are experiencing unprecedented levels of instability, conflict, economic collapse and, increasingly, the effects of a changing climate. The war in Syria and attendant impacts on the region continue with no end in sight. Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan are host to most of the four million

According to IOM data, more than 900,000 migrants, refugees and asylum seekers arrived in the European Union through the Mediterranean in 2015, almost entirely via the Eastern and Central Mediterranean routes to Greece and Italy. The number of deaths – more than 3,500 in 2015 – exceeds 2014's record death toll. And it is not known how many additional deaths go unreported. Even when estimates of the missing are available following shipwrecks in the Mediterranean, bodies are often not found. We should also not forget that many migrants die en route to Europe in Africa and the Middle East. In mid-June, the bodies of 48

migrants were found decaying in the desert between Niger and Algeria.

A neglected dimension of the situation in the Mediterranean is the ramifications for the families of those who die, particularly when the body is never found or there is no identification of the dead. Not only do families experience what has been called 'ambiguous loss' but a person going missing can affect family dynamics and social relations, the family's economic situation, and processes like inheritance, remarriage and guardianship of children.

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Syrians who have fled their homelands. They deserve to be strongly commended for it but, with limited prospects in the region, inevitably many displaced people are now making their way to Europe through Turkey and Greece via the Eastern Mediterranean route. Political instability in Libya has not decreased, and so it continues to be both a source and a channel of irregular flows to Italy via the Central Mediterranean route.

### Policy challenges

While the numbers arriving in Europe increased in 2015 and pressures in some spots have ignited tensions and drawn media attention, this is not a crisis beyond the capability of Europe to manage together as a Union, provided it has a clear-eyed understanding of the policy challenges that must be tackled.

First, Europe owes it to itself to set aside the current migration narrative. It is toxic at present and it hints at a denial of both European history and European values. We need to get back to a more balanced dialogue. We need to refute misleading myths and stereotypes and recall that historically migration has been overwhelmingly positive. Through open dialogue and examination of evidence, we can re-discover that well-managed migration is consistent with development.

The second challenge is learning to manage diversity. Demographics indicate that most countries of the world will in future become more multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious. This is a recipe for social well-being and economic prosperity. But to achieve these goals we will need a lot of political courage and imagination, and investments in public information, awareness and dialogue. To begin with, we need to move the debate from its focus on identity to a focus on common values. We need to grasp the essential fact that others may not look like me or speak like me but can share common commitments and ideas.

Thirdly, it is integral to good migration governance that we marry sovereign rights and obligations with the rights, obligations and dreams of migrants, reconcile national

security and human security, and balance sovereignty and individual freedom.

### Priorities for action

The first priority is to save lives. In the short term, rescue at sea needs to remain robust and well resourced.

The second priority is to provide effective responses to the mass humanitarian flows reaching Europe. The broad lines of action have already been identified and they are consonant with the operational modalities that have been used to deal successfully with such emergency situations in the past.

Effective reception arrangements must be set up. The International Organization of Migration (IOM) welcomes the commitment to solidarity through increasing European Union (EU) support to front-line Member States which are receiving high numbers of migrant arrivals, and stands ready to contribute to the efforts of the involved EU agencies and Member States.

We also welcome and strongly support the European Commission's proposal for an expanded relocation scheme to better achieve the impact that is needed given significant pressures on frontline EU States as well as in neighbouring countries currently hosting millions of displaced people. Equitable sharing of relocation among EU Member States and increased resettlement within and beyond the EU must be part of the solution.

Experience has taught us that in order to protect the integrity of the international protection framework, status determination systems must be put into place to distinguish between people who have a genuine need for protection and those whose claims for asylum cannot be established. For the latter, voluntary return to their country of origin will be the most appropriate solution but careful planning and implementation are necessary for this to be successful and sustainable. Looking ahead, it will be necessary to invest in reintegration programmes that will enable returnees to rejoin their communities of origin.

Some interventions may be desirable before migrants reach Europe. IOM is planning a test in Niger of its Migration



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Response and Resource Mechanism (MRRM). Its aim is to provide operational support to government authorities to address complex migratory flows, as well as facilitating the identification and registration of migrants and supporting data collection to feed into evidence-based policy and programming. IOM is also planning to establish an MRRM pilot facility in Libya, stability permitting, and is exploring the feasibility of MRRMs in Turkey and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Finally, a robust international response must rapidly be put into place to end trafficking and smuggling operations as well as measures aimed at undercutting their business on both shores of the Mediterranean, recognising that criminal networks operate across regions.

The third priority is nothing less than a paradigm shift in the governance of migration. However pressing the current humanitarian crisis, a response that focuses solely on immediate humanitarian and security needs without addressing the broader picture – the underlying drivers of irregular migration, the demand for labour migration at all skill levels and the impact of communication networks – will be neither effective nor sustainable in the longer term. Without a long-term vision to guide policy and practice and to respond

to community apprehensions we will be trapped in a crisis-mode intervention time warp. The current humanitarian crisis should be for us all a reminder of the importance that mobility has acquired in today's world. We cannot wish this away. We can only accept it as part of our contemporary reality and manage it for the benefit of all.

We need bold, collective thinking and action to develop a truly comprehensive approach to the governance of migration. That will in turn ensure provision of the precious commodity of protection for refugees, and create channels for safe and regular migration for high- and low-skilled workers and those in need of family reunification. Such an approach would also need to offer community stabilisation and development programmes in countries of origin for migrants as well as countries of first refuge for refugees to reduce migratory pressures.

Regular dialogue with countries of origin and transit is critical to achieving consensus on these important matters, addressing the root causes and the immediate challenges that the migrant flows represent.

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