

Sustainable Migration in Europe

Summary of proceedings from the EMN Norway Conference, 13 December 2018, Brussels

The conference presented the main pillars of the *sustainable migration approach*, making it relevant to the migration policies of the European Union. Keynote speakers were **Professors Alexander Betts** and **Sir Paul Collier**, **Magnus Ovilius**, DG Migration and Home Affairs /Chair EMN, **Professors Grete Brochmann** and **Anne Skevik Grødem**, and Norwegian Nobel Committee member **Asle Toje**. Organisers were EMN Norway with support from the EMN secretariat.

Whether 'migration is good or bad?' is the wrong question - the pertinent question is how much and what kind of composition is best?

This observation by Collier in his 2013 publication *Exodus* marks the point of departure for a *sustainable migration approach* committed to the **regulation of migration flows**. Betts and Collier's *Refuge* (2017) extends *Exodus*' perspectives to refugee policy, as they make the case for **regional solutions** to refugee flows. A *sustainable migration approach* is also a **comprehensive approach** as analysis must be done from an economic, social and cultural perspective and interests considered in relation to i) countries of origin, ii) regional havens and iii) host countries. Finally, migration is not a 'Home Affairs' issue alone: better **coherence across policy fields** is urgently needed.

What are the key components of a sustainable migration approach?

Migration is sustainable when it has: i) a **democratic mandate** i.e. when the volume and composition of migrants are acceptable to the population; ii) when the outcomes of decisions made result in **no regrets** by parties involved; and iii) when the **duty of rescue** for both refugees and the 'bottom billion' is fulfilled – *rescue* preferably in regional havens with a **development approach targeting both refugees and host societies, rather than refugees alone under long term** humanitarian aid dependency.

What must be done to deliver sustainable migration?

Changing a widespread narrative that African countries cannot provide a future for their young people who must choose between 'Europe or death' has to be a core goal, alongside **awareness raising** about the cost and extreme danger of migration journeys. Related to this is the idea of moving jobs to people rather than people to jobs. Africa is short of firms and lacks knowledge on how to run them. EU-based firms can establish branches and train staff in African countries. Circular migration rather than long-term migration could be a 'triple win' for country of origin, migrant as well as host country, and help to share the benefits of migration to more people.

Is there a limit to the absorption capacity of host societies, and if so, how can it be determined?

Brochmann and Grødem underscored the political significance of the concept of **absorption capacity** and indicated that there are limits, but that these should be investigated in relation to volume, composition and rate of immigration. The limits of absorption capacity vary considerably across countries depending on socio-economic factors, welfare regimes in place as well as culture and other variables, which also have an impact on a host society's absorption capacity.

What is the significance of "culture" in analysing absorption capacity?

Asle Toje reflected on the challenges that cultural differences can bring to host societies, and the **public acceptance of degrees of cultural difference** and social complexity/inequality. Culture impacts on immigration as well as integration; Diasporas can act as long term pull factors for more migrants, and trends suggest that groups from some countries integrate more successfully than others.

Next steps

Magnus Ovilius closed the event, reporting that the EMN would launch '**round tables**' to encourage debate on challenging issues. As a provider of impartial evidence on migration and asylum issues, the EMN is establishing itself as an effective forum for the starting point of such discussions.

FIND OUT MORE

More information about the Conference can be found at: www.emnnorway.no