European Migration Network Roundtable

SUSTAINABLE MIGRATION FROM AFRICA TO EUROPE

9 December 2020

9 am-4 pm CET

SHORT BACKGROUND PAPER

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this introductory paper is to outline thoughts and ideas on how to define and operationalise the concept of 'sustainable migration' in preparation for the European Migration Network (EMN) **online roundtable on sustainable migration from Africa to Europe which will take place on 9 December 2020.**

By bringing together distinguished interlocutors from both continents, the sustainability of current and prospective patterns of this inter-continental migration will be discussed, from the perspectives of both European and African countries, and measures that could be taken to make migration more sustainable will be identified.

The concept of sustainable migration

'Sustainable migration' is a basic concept in Norwegian Government documents; indeed, the Government's goal formulation for immigration policies is *'sustainable immigration'*. We also find the term now established in several EU documents. But what we should mean by 'sustainable migration', and how we should measure what this entails, is not explained in these documents. Nor will a dive into migration research reveal many sources which try to define or explain 'sustainable migration' beyond what is linked to the current EMN Norway project. However, a Google search for "sustainable migration" in 2017 gave two hits; today the figure will be around 180 million.

EMN Norway has been putting 'Sustainable migration from poor to rich countries' on the agenda since 2016. We have been fortunate to work with leading researchers who have contributed to the development of a *Sustainable Migration Approach* through a series of roundtable conferences and the EMN Norway occasional papers identified in Annex 1.

As conceived so far, 'sustainable migration' is a *normative* concept, and like 'sustainable development', a goal that may provide direction to policy making. Furthermore, sustainable migration must be measured in relation to parameters such as the volume, composition and speed of migration. Sustainable migration must also be conceived in the context – economic, social, cultural, political - within which migration occurs. Thus, sustainable migration would not be understood in the same way in Norway as it would be in a Gulf State such as Dubai, where some 85% of the population are foreign-born.

The roundtable discussions will have as a background the *Sustainable Migration Framework* developed by Oxford University Professors Alexander Betts and Paul Collier, on the initiative of EMN Norway. Papers developed by these two distinguished authors, plus complementary papers developed by other leading

academics and commentators were presented at conferences hosted in Oslo and Brussels respectively in June and December 2018.

EMN Norway's occasional paper *Sustainable Migration Approach* provides a wider overview of relevant contributors to this framework and develops the approach further. Links to this occasional paper, plus other relevant resources, are provided in annex to this paper. For the up-coming roundtable, EMN Norway coordinator Øyvind Jaer will set the stage and give a short introduction to 'sustainable migration' in the opening of Panel 1: *Roadmaps to sustainable migration*.

Is 'sustainable migration' a fruitful concept? Oxford Professors Alexander Betts and Paul Collier, key contributors to the sustainable migration approach, have a clear reply to this question:

"... the concept of sustainable migration ...has the potential to reset the debate on criteria on which a new consensus can be forged...Our goal is to avoid the destabilising politics of panic. ...we offer a framework for sustainable migration based on a securely defensible ethics that can help guide and inform governments and elected politicians around the world. (2018)"

Theoretical roots

Professor Collier's book *Exodus* (2013) and his joint book with Professor Betts *Refuge* (2017), do not use the term 'Sustainable migration'. Indeed, as mentioned above, this term was not widely applied when these books were published; still, they provide the point of departure for a *Sustainable Migration Approach*.

Exodus sets the stage and brings forward 'the whole of the route' approach. *Exodus* also stages a provocative, but important question about migration:

"'Is migration good or bad?'... is the wrong question ...as sensible as it would be to ask, 'Is eating good or bad?' In both cases the pertinent question is not good or bad, but **how much...and what kind of composition ... is better***." (Exodus p. 26 and p. 260).*

Closely linked to this, is the 'warning' of 'tipping points': if migration accelerates, what then? Marginal growth in quantity can suddenly lead to a qualitative jump – to an 'explosive' situation of «regrets and panic» which demands a 'dramatic' change in policy. An example here is the European migrant/refugee crises in 2015.

Refuge is a solid argument for '*regional solutions*'– the key topic of Panel 3 exploring prospects for the provision of protection for displaced persons in their neighbouring regions. How may development assistance by European countries contribute in this regard? *Refuge* argues for a development approach to regional solutions targeting both refugees, local populations and host societies. *Refuge* also argues for *«burden-sharing»* based on the principle of *«comparative advantage»*: The comparative advantages of neighbouring host countries are as regional havens which are mostly, but not always, similar in culture, social and economic patterns and standards, with country of origin. The comparative advantages of rich countries are capacities to finance the costs as well as provide the required expertise and trading opportunities. Rich countries are *"...far less well-placed geographically and culturally, but much better placed to provide the finance:.."* (p. 104). In short, regional solutions are super 'effective altruism' in comparison with very costly and not unfrequently challenging humanitarian immigration from distant countries to European welfare states.

DEFINING 'SUSTAINABLE MIGRATION'

The *Sustainable Migration Framework* (Collier and Betts, 2018) – see link below – is a key background paper for the current roundtable. Particularly valuable is the definition of 'sustainable migration' which goes as follows:

"Migration that has i) the democratic support of the receiving society, ii) meets the long-term interests of the receiving state, sending society, and migrants themselves, and iii) fulfils basic ethical obligations" (2018).

i) «*Democratic support of the receiving society*» is related to the numbers, composition and speed of immigration on the one hand and economic, social, cultural and political absorption capacity on the other. If these elements are unbalanced, the situation will probably not be perceived as legitimate and we may expect falling democratic support.

ii) *«Meets the long term «enlightened» interests...»*". To which extent migration meets the interests of the parties involved and thus proves sustainable, will materialise when the parties conclude *«regrets or no regrets»* with the migration chapter concerned. If the majority of the population in the host country experiences the immigration as too large, too complicated and too fast – if they have such regrets – then the immigration policy that led to this result is perceived as non-sustainable. The same kind of 'regret-no-regret' logic is also valid with regard to the migrants themselves and to 'those left behind' in the country of origin – i.e. the *e*migration perspective. If those left behind do not receive remittances and assistance as expected and the country of origin needs the skills of those who left, then that *e*migration case was non-sustainable.

iii) The third part of the definition «*fulfils basic ethical obligations*" refers to the moral imperative – «*rescue*» – operationalised in two ways: a)«rescue» as 'saved' from danger caused by persecution, war, natural disaster etc. – what we may call a broad refugee policy portfolio, and b)«rescue» as aid to help lift poor and vulnerable societies out of poverty and insecurity – i.e. a humanitarian and development policy portfolio.

Toje, in his occasional paper (see Annex below), reflects on 'cultural sustainability', the challenges that cultural differences can bring to host societies, and to which extent the public accepts cultural diversity and socio-economic inequality. Toje defines cultural sustainability as follows: *"Put simply, a workable definition of culturally sustainable migration might be 'migration that has the democratic support of the receiving society', as illustrated in polls taken up at regular intervals."*

ROADMAPS TO SUSTAINABLE MIGRATION

The assessment of the sustainability of migration from Africa to Europe will be related to a major and recent policy initiative, namely *the New Pact on Migration and Asylum*, launched by the European Commission on 23 September 2020. This initiative indeed aims at a comprehensive migration governance. Even though the Pact does not explicitly have sustainable migration as a policy goal, the framework and approach referred to above may serve as an analytical tool for reflection. We will consider, is the European Pact fit for the sustainability test? The presentation of the external dimension of the Pact will be followed up under Panel 1 by the Head of the International Unit of the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, Ms Davinia Wood.

Throughout the roundtable, particular references will be made to the New Pact on Migration and Asylum and its emphasis on further development of the external dimensions of EU migration and asylum policies through migration partnerships with third-countries, including African countries. These partnerships will take due account of the interests of partner third-countries, and attempt to create win-win-situations, where migration may be sustained while accommodating the interests of countries of origin, transit and destination.

'The whole of route approach'

This and the following sections will be particularly relevant for the proceedings under Panel 2 of the Roundtable: *Costs and benefits of sustainable migration from Africa to Europe*.

Questions of sustainability as well as costs and benefits – broadly understood – of migration, have to be assessed in context – also in the context of the 'whole of the migration chain': i) countries of origin = *e*migration, ii) regional havens/transit countries – **secondary** migration and repatriation; iii) host/destination countries = *im*migration-integration-absorption. This perspective is valuable, enlightening the question of sustainability for all parties involved. For example, how changing rules of immigration in

countries of destination may impact on *e*migration from countries of origin with negative brain drain' results.

Sustainability may also mean different things for a nation state than for a local community. A typical challenge for rural areas – at least in Norway – is depopulation and the need for people – immigration. For cities like Oslo, the challenge may be quite the opposite, namely 'parallel societies' reaching a 'tipping point' of numbers – critical mass and densification – to reproduce its traditional cultural logic and behaviour, instead of integration and assimilation.

THE DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability as well as costs and benefits, should be assessed from economic, social, cultural and political perspectives. The economic perspective is obvious and well researched here in Norway. The social perspective has a basis so far in Putnam's work on trust, but will have to focus more on immigration related phenomena as 'parallel societies', cultural diversity and the question of social cohesion, trust etc. The cultural perspective is less developed and will have to focus more on the reproduction of immigrants' values, ideas and culturally defined behaviour. Finally, the political perspective is highlighted by Professors Betts and Collier in their Framework paper, discussed above. Policies must have a democratic mandate. The thresholds that may lead to political 'backlash' – to political *tipping points* – will differ according to how migration is socio-culturally perceived and policies supported by the public.

THE QUESTION OF 'ABSORPTION CAPACITY' OF HOST SOCIETIES

Sustainable migration from third countries to Europe is indeed also a question of sustainable *im*migration, of the costs and benefits for the destination countries.

Immigration policies should be designed to maintain a sustainable level with reference to i) number of immigrants, ii) composition/categories of migrant groups, iii) the distribution and settlement of immigrants in the localities/municipalities and iv) the speed of immigration.

- Number: How many arrivals (flows) during a defined period? How many migrants are here (stocks) on a particular date? What is their distribution in the country as such, and in specific municipalities/localities?

- Composition: Who arrives/is here mapped according to educational attainment, skills, willingness as well as ability – cultural competence – to integrate etc.

- Distribution/settlement pattern: How are different migrant groups settled and distributed in relation to need, district political goals, degree of 'critical mass' with special attention to avoidance of the creation of parallel societies, social cohesion, trust etc.

- Speed: The speed of immigration changes (flows and stocks) at the national and local level is important with reference to the potential for parallel societies to develop, trust, social cohesion and systemic tipping points.

Impact will depend upon context, for example immigrants' participation in the labour market, the rights and welfare benefits granted as well as the broader immigration regime of the host country.

Consider labour migration, particularly circular migration, from poor countries:

Economic migration, in opposition to humanitarian migration (asylum, protection) is primarily transactional. It should be based on a logic of reciprocity and should benefit all parties involved as receiving societies, migrants, and sending societies. Circular migration can have considerable reciprocal benefits. This is especially the case when based on careful matching between sending and receiving society needs, not just at national levels, but also the local level. Circular migration from poor developing countries can be a promising scheme for development cooperation having then to work in cooperation with migration authorities.

High-skilled movement from poor to rich countries is economically beneficial to receiving states as well as the migrants. But it is not always perceived as politically or culturally beneficial in the host country, and it may very well harm the sending societies if they lose needed human capital. It is important to find ways to manage such movements in a way that addresses sources of political and cultural concern, and also ensures that countries of origin benefit from the movements.

But technologies are changing and the future demand for workers to 'elementary jobs' are expected to decrease significantly, as one may read in EMN Norway occasional paper *Automation and Robotisation*... (2019). How many low skilled workers will the future labour market be able to absorb, and what will be the effects on job opportunities for different groups of workers?

ANNEX 1

Links to EMN Norway Occasional papers on sustainable migration

- Sustainable Migration approach (in pipeline, not online)

- Temporary asylum and cessation of refugee status in Scandinavia – policies, practices, and dilemmas, Jan-Paul Brekke, Jens Vedsted-Hansen og Rebecca Thorburn Stern (2020)

- Human Rights and Migration. A critical analysis of the jurisprudence of the European court of Human Rights, Ole Gjems – Onstad, (2020)

- Automation/Robotisation – Demography – Immigration: Possibilities for low-skilled immigrants in the Norwegian labour market of tomorrow, Rolf Røtnes ET. AL. (2019)

- The significance of culture, Asle Toje (2019)

- Absorption capacity as means for assessing sustainable migration, Grete Brochmann and Anne Skevik Grødem (2019)

- Sustainable migration in Europe, Alexander Betts and Paul Collier (2018a)

- Sustainable migration framework, Alexander Betts and Paul Collier (2018b)

- Defining sustainable migration, Marta Bivand Erdal, Jørgen Carling, Cindy Horst and Cathrine Talleraas (2018c)