



European
University
Institute

ROBERT
SCHUMAN
CENTRE FOR
ADVANCED
STUDIES

RSCAS POLICY
PAPERS

RSC PP 2021/01
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies
Global Governance Programme

Mobility in the Mediterranean. Refocusing EuroMed
relations on work, vocational training and mobility

Ghazi Ben Ahmed

European University Institute

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

Global Governance Programme

**Mobility in the Mediterranean. Refocusing EuroMed relations
on work, vocational training and mobility**

Ghazi Ben Ahmed

RSC Policy Paper 2021/01

Terms of access and reuse for this work are governed by the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC-BY 4.0) International license. If cited or quoted, reference should be made to the full name of the author(s), editor(s), the title, the working paper series and number, the year and the publisher.

ISSN 1830-1541

© Ghazi Ben Ahmed, 2021

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC-BY 4.0) International license.
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Published in February 2021 by the European University Institute.
Badia Fiesolana, via dei Roccettini 9
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy

Views expressed in this publication reflect the opinion of individual author(s) and not those of the European University Institute.

This publication is available in Open Access in Cadmus, the EUI Research Repository:
<https://cadmus.eui.eu>

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

The Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, created in 1992 and currently directed by Professor Brigid Laffan, aims to develop inter-disciplinary and comparative research on the major issues facing the process of European integration, European societies and Europe's place in 21st century global politics.

The Centre is home to a large post-doctoral programme and hosts major research programmes, projects and data sets, in addition to a range of working groups and ad hoc initiatives. The research agenda is organised around a set of core themes and is continuously evolving, reflecting the changing agenda of European integration, the expanding membership of the European Union, developments in Europe's neighbourhood and the wider world.

For more information: <http://eui.eu/rscas>

The **Policy Paper Series** of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies complements its Working Papers Series. This series aims to disseminate the views of a person or a group on a particular policy matter, specifically in the field of European integration.

The European University Institute and the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies are not responsible for the proposals and opinions expressed by the author(s).

The aim of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies is to contribute to the public debate by offering views and opinions on matters of general interest.

The EUI and the RSC are not responsible for the opinion expressed by the author(s).

The Global Governance Programme

The Global Governance Programme is one of the flagship programmes of the Robert Schuman Centre. It is a community of outstanding professors and scholars, that produces high quality research and engages with the world of practice through policy dialogue. Established and early-career scholars work on issues of global governance within and beyond academia, focusing on four broad and interdisciplinary areas: Global Economics, Europe in the World, Cultural Pluralism and Global Citizenship.

The Programme also aims to contribute to the fostering of present and future generations of policy and decision makers through its executive training programme: the Academy of Global Governance, where theory and 'real world' experience meet and where leading academics, top-level officials, heads of international organisations and senior executives discuss on topical issues relating to global governance.

For more information: <http://globalgovernanceprogramme.eui.eu>

Abstract

As migration in the Mediterranean region is set to increase, driven by income gaps, climate change, and other diverse reasons, the Euro-Mediterranean partners should engage in fair discussions to overcome blockages with a long term vision, while the EU should set up a more integrated policy towards neighbours that would stop working in silos. Declustering policies will alleviate tensions with the Southern neighbours and make it easier to negotiate a global, comprehensive and mutually beneficial deal, that promote also a safe, orderly, and regular migration, which would help maximize returns for sending and receiving countries. A constructive dialogue will help demystifying migration, dispassionate the debate and prompt the governments at all levels (along with NGOs and media) to find efficient ways to inject information into highly polarised and contentious policy debates.

Keywords

Migration, Mobility, EuroMed, EU governance, DCFTA, Brain Drain, GVC, Services, Media.

Introduction*

The pandemic has profoundly affected livelihoods and is causing many citizens in the Southern Mediterranean region to fall deeper into poverty. Early evidence from the Mediterranean Development Initiative (MDI) surveys in Tunisia indicates that the pandemic has disproportionately affected the poor. Poorer households are more likely to be self-employed or work in the informal sector, both areas that have been more affected by the pandemic. As a result, it is the most vulnerable that will most probably lose their incomes, and this may trigger a new wave of migration towards Europe.

The EU has already taken action to deal with the migration crisis following the Arab spring in 2011, and proposed a set of measures to address the issue in the longer term. Among these, the Dialogue on migration, mobility and security, and its controversial mobility partnerships. Morocco was the first country from the Mediterranean region to enter into a mobility partnership with the EU¹ while negotiations are in a stalemate with Tunisia. A Dialogue with Jordan has also started. While the Mobility Partnership is presented by the EU as a tool to promote mobility, several NGOs criticize it and highlight among other the “serious risks it poses to the rights of refugees and migrants.”²

As migration is set to increase, driven by income gaps, climate change, and other diverse reasons, the Euro-Mediterranean partners should engage in fair discussions to overcome blockages with a long term vision, while the EU should set up a more integrated policy towards neighbours that would stop working in silos – education, mobility, development, trade, open sky, or security... Declustering policies will alleviate tensions with the Southern neighbours and make it easier to negotiate a global, comprehensive and mutually beneficial deal, that promote also a safe, orderly, and regular migration, which would help maximize returns for sending and receiving countries. A constructive dialogue will help demystifying migration, dispassionate the debate and prompt the governments at all levels (along with NGOs and media) to find efficient ways to inject information into highly polarised and contentious policy debates.

Communicating more effectively in the age of fake news

Mobility and migration are becoming difficult to apprehend, expose divisions and tensions between EU Member States and disorient public opinion. The proliferation of expert opinions, media platforms, and the surge of politically motivated “fake news” means that much of the information people receive about migration is not vetted or not trusted anymore. It is becoming increasingly difficult to know which facts to trust. As argued by Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan:

Politicians have taken advantage of this phenomenon, when convenient, to disseminate information that at times is of dubious quality, and at others long since debunked. When these tactics are rewarded with electoral success, a vicious circle is created in which competing politicians have less and less incentives to deal with proven facts. In this environment, messages conveyed by politicians through emotional appeals may be seen as more authentic than those backed up by research.³

* Mediterranean Development Initiative (MDI) and Program Associate, Global Governance Program, European University Institute.

¹ Morocco is the fifth country with which the EU has signed a Mobility Partnership, following Moldova and Cape Verde in 2008, Georgia in 2009 and Armenia in 2011.

² <https://euromedrights.org/publication/eu-morocco-mobility-partnership-border-control-at-the-expense-of-human-lives/>

³ Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan (2018), When Facts Don't Matter: How to Communicate More Effectively About Migration's Costs and Benefits,” https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/TCM-WhenFactsDontMatter_Final.pdf

Public opinion in Europe has become seemingly impervious to facts, amid avalanche of fake news shared by media outlets and through social media. We witness prolific and polarising debates over migration, where half the population is fearful of the impact of the ‘foreigners’ on their way of life and convinced that any new entrants would unfairly get valuable and scarce resources, while the other half is feeling a moral duty to help refugees and/or is enthusiastic about the positive effects of enhanced movement and integration, but is also worrying about the impact of increased migration on security and even terrorism. The opportunities to engage on migration issues lies here, in the different shades of grey of the ‘anxious middle’. Merely showcasing figures and facts is unlikely to ease concerns because of the strong bias against ‘experts’. Thus, facts are unlikely to be a persuasive tool on their own. Instead, advocates should explore innovative ways to explain journeys and experiences.

In the face of this shaken state of public opinion, shortcomings in current policies and the extent of the migratory phenomenon, talks on a mobility partnership that would further facilitate legal migration to Europe for Southern Mediterranean businesspeople, students, and young workers should be revived. With the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Process, there is a need to rethink the way we approach complementarity and solidarity and go beyond the simplistic logic based on geography alone. As argued by Nasser Bourita, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Morocco in December 2020:

The concept of ‘neighbour’ may be misleading since it creates a distorting ‘Us and Them’ mentality. The renewed ENP must transcend these notions and provide a clear political perspective that tackles the challenges but also brings answers to each partner’s ambitions.”⁴

Although negotiations are challenging, managing migration well would significantly stimulate trade in goods and services and bring essence to a moribund Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

“Managing migration well” is a shared task

In her November 2020 speech at the high-level conference on migration and asylum in Europe Ursula von der Leyen acknowledged that “Managing migration well starts in the home countries of those who come to Europe.”⁵ People do not leave their homes easily and embark on such a dangerous journey. As the Somali poet Warsan Shire writes: “no one puts their children in a boat / unless the water is safer than the land.” So yes, poverty and lack of perspectives are strong driving forces that urge migrants to leave their home country. But not the only ones.

Drivers of migration in the Mediterranean region are varied and overlapping, from economic determinants of voluntary labor migration to the underlying political causes driving forced displacement. Income gaps, demographic trends and youth unemployment and a bad education with low returns in the professional life, represent some of the main drivers of “voluntary”, labor migration in the Mediterranean region.⁶ In addition, forced displacement (because of wars and conflicts, some of them caused by Europe like in Libya) and climate change (with millions of people displaced by shoreline erosion, coastal flooding and agricultural disruption) also constitute important determinants of migration flows in the region.

Less known, the sense of despair, which is exasperated by the lack of a perceived improvement and a feeling of imprisonment, constitutes a strong push factor. According to a focus group done by MDI in Tunisia among young graduated, the number one reason for migration is to get the European citizenship,

⁴ <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/news/article/in-conversation-with-nasser-bourita>

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_2157

⁶ World Bank, 2018. Moving for Prosperity: Global Migration and Labor Markets. *Policy Research Report Overview*, World Bank Group.

synonym of freedom. Free movement is a key issue for millennials.⁷ Without visas, and in absence of a real change, the youth present Symptoms of Prisoner Depression similar to what people experienced with prolonged lockdown during the first wave of Covid-19. Capsized travel plans, indefinite isolation and panic over scarce re-resources could be a recipe for unchecked anxiety, associated with a host of negative outcomes including poorer cognitive performance, impaired executive control and self-regulation, lower levels of self-rated physical health, substance abuse, depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation. Further, the feeling of exclusion might expose vulnerable young people to brainwashing by criminal networks in connection with terrorism.

Since migration is influenced by a broad range of economic and social factors in origin and destination countries, no single policy lever is enough to regulate it. We need a sustainable comprehensive solution, which is agreed and shared by the two shores of the Mediterranean.

The European commission has announced its intention to combat people smugglers, strengthen external borders, and deepen external partnership, and to ensure that people who have the right to stay are integrated and made to feel welcome. But this policy cannot be unilateral only. It must be multipronged as border walls would not stop most illegal immigration and the development of Southern neighbouring countries will not dry up a labour emigration that will grow and that Europe will need. The EU needs new migration narratives for constructive dialogue and ambitious partnership with its Southern partners.

A sustainable comprehensive solution needed

In the South of the Mediterranean, labor market challenges are shaped by the “youth bulge”, which means that 300 million young people will enter the labor market by 2050, requiring the creation of millions of jobs. Meanwhile, populations are ageing rapidly in almost every European country. The situation will be exacerbated in the near future with the post-war baby-boom generation reaching retirement. Consequently, Europe will witness a decrease in the working-age population, an increase in the retired population, and a heavy burden for the current and future working-age population to carry out the social welfare obligations. As a result, the increased unmet demand from countries on the northern shore of the Mediterranean will translate into a “pull” factor for many of those living on the southern shore.⁸

We need a sustainable solution, a proposition to regulate migration on both sides of the Mediterranean in a way that promotes orderly and regular migration and that can benefit both origin and destination countries.

The economic and social impacts of migration are wide-reaching and varied. In countries of origin, effects of migration include remittances and diaspora investments, increased trade, foreign direct investment and technology transfers. In destination countries, migrants fill critical gaps in the labour markets such as farm workers for harvest and in several cases provide many services and products at lower prices. Some 80% of the skilled people that Europe needs to do the seasonal work (to secure supplies and prevent price rises) come from abroad. It is difficult if not impossible to make this up locally.⁹

⁷ Young people have different life priorities compared to their parents. While previous generations focused on acquiring their own house and car, Millennials are rejecting these traditional achievements, placing a much higher importance on intangible, life-enriching moments, such as travel.

⁸ Börsch-Supan, A., Leite, D.N. and Rausch, J., 2019. Demographic changes, migration and economic growth in the Euro area. In *Prepared for the ECB Forum on Central Banking* (pp. 17-19).

⁹ The numbers involved are substantial: France is short of about 200,000 workers until the end of May, while Spain has a shortfall of 70,000 to 80,000. Italy needs about 250,000 seasonal workers in the next two months, while the UK normally receives 70,000 to 80,000 over the season and Germany 300,000.

Migrants fill also critical gaps in the high tech labour markets where shortages of workers with relevant qualifications have become a major challenge affecting European competitiveness, and soon also Southern partners with massive brain-drain. In the context of rapid technological change, Europe's declining population and ageing workforce mean that labour shortages are expected to increase in the future.

While the effects of immigrants on natives' jobs and wages are hotly debated, the overall effects are positive, while distributional concerns remain. Migrants, in some contexts, have been shown to contribute to the tax base as well as social security systems, leading to an overall positive fiscal effect. Moreover, migration can have further positive effects due to migrants' generally higher levels of education and innovation, witnessed by the numerous productivity spillovers.

The pandemic has demonstrated the vulnerabilities of complex supply chains and the need for Europe to diversify its suppliers. Southern Mediterranean countries have competitive advantages in this regard. The challenge will then be for the SMNs to adapt their offer and be able to respond to any European dynamic geared towards the regional reorganization of the production and supply model.¹⁰ Therefore, Euro-Mediterranean countries need to change their perceptions, and evolve their thinking from one that's focused only on loans and development, to working together for a new model of cooperation that will enhance their mutual resilience and create an economic space of shared prosperity.

Fewer silos and a fairer partnership

The organisation of the European Commission needs less silos. For instance, migration and human capital mobility could contribute to broader economic integration and development in the Mediterranean region, but they are negotiated separately. So, through its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), the EU, under the lead of Directorate General for Trade (DG Trade), is seeking to economically tie many partners in the Southern Mediterranean countries to its market, especially by liberalizing services. But free movement of people, intimately linked to free movement of services, is negotiated by DG Home for Schengen visa less than 90 days, and by member states for more than 90 days.

Carried out in parallel, these negotiations were eventually linked following a Tunisian request, reflecting the fear that freer movement of goods, financial flows and services would not mean freer movement of people.¹¹ The Mobility Partnership has been criticized by Marco Jonville as follows:

[R]eadmission agreements involve very important responsibilities with regard to the expulsions of Tunisians or persons from third countries having transited a priori through Tunisian territory before leaving for Europe. In exchange, the EU would only propose a slight facilitation of visas for a Tunisian elite already favoured in the visa granting process, and whose stays outside the territory also represent an advantage for European interests.¹²

Skilled worker mobility across the Mediterranean would be a powerful way of alleviating skill shortages and transferring knowledge across borders. It would also be crucial to boost productivity. When employers can choose from a broader talent pool, they can make better matches and make the best possible use of a scarce resource, especially in the framework of regionalization of global value chains.

In order to secure fairer cooperation with Southern Mediterranean countries on migration, particularly on border management, readmission of their own nationals who are irregularly present in

¹⁰ Ghazi Ben Ahmed, The EuroMed25: A new blueprint for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership to build resilience and bring hope and prosperity to the Region, *Encompass*, October 2020: at <https://encompass-europe.com/comment/the-euromed25-a-new-blueprint-for-the-euro-mediterranean-partnership-to-build-resilience-and-bring-hope-and-prosperity-to-the-region>

¹¹ EU-Tunisia negotiations: Free trade without trading freedoms? <https://www.cadtm.org/EU-Tunisia-negotiations-Free-trade>

¹² <https://ftdes.net/en/eu-tunisia-negotiations-free-trade-without-trading-freedoms/>. This timid step forward contrasts with the systematic granting of three-month visas for European nationals arriving in Tunisia.

the EU, and reception of third country nationals who transited to Europe through their territories, a long term vision is needed, along with a declustering of the organisation of the European Commission. That means to fully link the issues of mobility and trade, in a broader partnership that reflects Tunisia's priorities and EU fairness in negotiations as in the case of services trade, cross-border mobility of capital and natural persons becomes a necessity.¹³ Hoekman and Ozden have advocated for services trade talks to be comprehensive in order to maximize potential gains, which would derive from a range of services requiring temporary mobility of services providers, using as an example the prospect of EU consumers to obtain medical services in partner countries that would be reimbursable by national medical and social insurance schemes.¹⁴

Changing geopolitics in Europe's neighbourhood, to the east and in the south, call for a further declustering of a number of policies, going beyond bilateral trade agreements and security measures, indicated Pascal Lamy.¹⁵ A first step would be to encourage temporary rather than longer-term or permanent movement of workers since ongoing negotiations for DCFTA provides scope for negotiating specific market access commitments for services, including those delivered through the cross-border movement of natural persons.

One option, would be for the EU to support the creation of talent pools located in Southern Med countries. These training centres will address both North and South needs via a system of public calls. Applicants responding to these calls and meeting the required qualifications should, under certain conditions, be eligible for work visas allowing them to seek employment in the EU for a short period of time. Hoekman and Ozden identify several political and economic reasons to prefer more temporary movement in addition to permanent migration, including lower brain drain losses and the temporary nature of the demographic bulge of young workers that are entering the labour market.¹⁶

Good intentions on the EU side are clearly not enough. It is time to change the methodology, find a common language and craft more comprehensive agreements more prone to 'quid pro quo concessions' than merely agreements based on free trade.

¹³ The definition also covers the cross-border movement of consumers of services as a means of facilitating supplier/consumer proximity.

¹⁴ Bernard Hoekman and Caglar Ozden, *The Euro–Mediterranean Partnership: Trade in Services as an Alternative to Migration?* *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 48, no. 4. 2010, pp. 835–857.

¹⁵ <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/interview/lamy-declustering-policies-will-alleviate-tensions-with-the-eus-neighbours/>

¹⁶ Op. cit.

Author contacts:

Ghazi Ben Ahmed
Les Berges du Lac 1,
1053 Tunis
Tunisia

Email: Ghazi BEN-AHMED <ghazi.benahmed@gmail.com>



With the support of the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The European Commission supports the EUI through the European Union budget. This publication reflects the views only of the author(s), and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.