

## 5 Conclusions

In this Assessment Report, we have explained how the new European Commission and the EU member states can work with migrants' countries of origin and transit to manage the external EU border more effectively and reduce irregular immigration while creating more regular employment opportunities in Europe for non-EU citizens. More and better-managed immigration can benefit all stakeholders and help to maintain public support for policies under which the EU and its member states contribute adequately to refugee protection world-wide and manage immigration in line with their capacity to provide for the social and economic integration of immigrants. The following key points can inform conversations with stakeholders in Europe and in countries of origin. From these discussions and negotiations, a comprehensive strategy can emerge that is 'owned' and implemented by all stakeholders.

First of all, most voters tend to support the presence of immigrants in their countries, the hosting of refugees under certain conditions, and certain forms of financial support for poor countries that host refugees. At the same time, voters want their governments to exercise greater control over immigration and processes related to asylum and refugee protection.

Second, control over immigration is also key to safeguarding the integrity of EU visa and asylum policies. Most immediately, this includes keeping in check unauthorized entry into EU territory at official border crossing points or by boat. Furthermore, it is crucial that immigrants who have no right to remain in the EU (because they have entered irregularly or overstayed their visa) can be returned and are readmitted by their countries of origin.

Third, effective and humane border management along with return and readmission require close cooperation with countries of origin and transit. However, such cooperation often runs against the economic and political interests of these countries: for example, when countries of origin help to curb irregular migration by their citizens to the EU, they deprive themselves of potential migrant remittances; in addition, migrants' families lose the money that they invested in emigration. Similarly, when low- and middle-income countries prevent refugees from moving on irregularly to the EU (e.g., Syrians seeking to move from Turkey to the EU), the primary host countries remain responsible for hosting these refugees and for the associated fiscal costs.

Therefore, fourth, cooperation between the EU and countries of origin and transit cannot be limited to border management and return and readmission.

Rather, agreements need to package a wide range of policies to ensure that the agreements benefit all parties consistently over time, rendering them 'self-enforcing' (i.e., each party would hurt itself by not fulfilling its obligations under the agreement). In many instances, agreements may be not be international treaties, but rather declarations by the parties involved (like the EU-Turkey 'agreement'), setting out policies that they commit to pursue. The EU, member states, and partner countries would be party to such informal agreements to the extent that they are responsible for the policies covered.

Specifically, to render cooperation in border management and return and readmission attractive for countries of origin and transit, we have argued that the EU needs to strengthen its ongoing efforts in two important areas. In the field of refugee protection in low- and middle-income countries, more financial support for refugees and more humanitarian and development cooperation with host countries would help to share responsibility for these refugees more fairly and effectively. The economic and social integration of refugees in their host economies and investment in public services and infrastructure to ensure that residents and refugees do not compete for scarce resources are areas of particular concern.

Regarding labor migration, we have argued that many countries of origin will only support curbing irregular migration to the EU if EU member states offer substantial opportunities for regular migration and employment in Europe. Such offers may usefully be coordinated and supported by the European Union. Legal migration opportunities would not be driven only by labor demand in EU member states, but also by the political need to find employment opportunities for country-of-origin citizens where they can support themselves, rather than depend on the welfare state. Development cooperation in the form of skill partnerships may sustain growth in legal migration opportunities in the long run.

Finally, overcoming the current impasse in the reform of the European asylum system will require a new approach to cooperation among member states. Refugee protection is a public good at the European level in important respects and joint action by member states is required to address it adequately. Still, member states differ substantially in their living standards, how they are affected by irregular immigration, and in their capacity and willingness to receive asylum seekers and host recognized refugees. Thus, we suggest that the common asylum policy should be based on 'flexible solidarity' among member states: member

states would contribute to border management and the hosting of refugees in line with their capacities and political preferences, while the joint financing of asylum policies through the EU budget and the peer review of member state contributions would ensure that responsibility is shared fairly.

With a more flexible approach, the ongoing revisions of seven legal texts that together codify the European asylum system would no longer have to be treated as a single undertaking; uncontroversial files could move ahead, while other files might be reconsidered in the light of flexible solidarity. In particular, long-standing (but never agreed-upon) proposals for a mandatory relocation of asylum seekers across EU member states could be replaced by a voluntary system of assistance to the few small member states that received a highly disproportionate number of asylum seekers. In the cases of Malta and Cyprus, voluntary relocation to other EU member states should be feasible because there are only relatively few asylum seekers involved. By contrast, assistance to the Greek authorities could usefully focus on fully implementing the agreement with Turkey to return those asylum seekers from the

Greek islands to Turkey who were already protected there.

Solidarity among EU member states will be strengthened to the extent that funding for asylum and migration-related policies in the 2021 to 2027 Multiannual Financial Framework is increased so that a larger slice of the costs of border management and refugee protection is shared among EU member states, rather than borne by the member state that implements a particular action. A peer review of member states' contributions to refugee protection can serve as a basis for sharing responsibility among member states for the management of the external EU border, the reception of asylum seekers, the hosting of recognized refugees, and their social and economic integration.

Overall, moving toward more effective policies on asylum and migration will require extensive consultations among stakeholders in Europe and in countries of origin and transit, and carefully calibrated decisions in several policy areas. The insights in this report can help to guide negotiations toward a policy framework for refugee protection and labor migration that improves outcomes for all stakeholders.