

# 3 Cooperation with non-EU countries to manage migration to the EU

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## 3.1 The setting: Gaps in the global governance of refugee protection and diverging interests among countries of origin and destination

It is widely accepted that international migration should be safe, orderly, and regular in order to benefit all stakeholders.<sup>3</sup> Public concerns about immigration in EU member states relate often (though not always) to irregular immigration, particularly to the implied lack of state control (section 1). For example, in the presence of irregular immigration, the destination country can neither determine the number of immigrants overall, nor can it ensure that immigrants meet specific criteria to facilitate their economic and social integration into the host society (from not having a criminal background to possessing language and professional skills).

Irregular immigration occurs in many different forms: irregular immigrants (i.e., those without the required travel documents/visa) enter the EU via its external land border, arrive by boat on the Mediterranean coast, or overstay their (otherwise regular) EU visa. Most irregular immigrants apply for asylum in the EU, rather than live clandestinely in an EU member state; of all applicants for asylum, more than half were recognized as refugees in 2018<sup>4</sup> (protection ratios

vary substantially across countries of origin). Hence, while working to constrain irregular immigration is in line with good migration policy practice as defined by the Global Compact for Migration and with the wishes of European voters, EU member states need to be aware that potential irregular immigrants may have a valid claim to international protection and should have access to effective protection either in their regions of origin or in Europe.

When irregular immigrants apply for asylum after arriving in the EU, a host of policy questions arise that can only be answered satisfactorily by EU member states cooperating among themselves and with non-EU countries of origin and transit: First, which EU member state should be responsible (financially and logistically) for receiving the asylum seekers and conducting asylum procedures? Second, which EU member state should be responsible for hosting those who are recognized as refugees, supporting their economic and social integration? Third, how should EU member states and countries of origin share responsibility for the safe return of those who are not rec-

<sup>3</sup> The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly on December 19, 2018, [www.iom.int/global-compact-migration](http://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration).

<sup>4</sup> See Eurostat, "Asylum Statistics: Statistics explained," Brussels (2019), 8, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/5777.pdf>.

ognized as refugees? Effective return and readmission procedures are crucial for preserving the integrity of the EU asylum system and limiting irregular immigration into the EU by those not entitled to international protection.

Beyond these questions lies a more fundamental one: How should EU member states share responsibility for hosting refugees (financially and logistically) with countries of first asylum outside Europe? Most asylum seekers in the EU come from outside Europe (applicants from Turkey and Russia are notable exceptions). In the process of traveling to the EU, they typically transit at least one non-European country that hosts significant numbers of their compatriots; for example, while many refugees from Eritrea live in the EU, a large number also live in Ethiopia.<sup>5</sup> As a result, refugees who arrive in Europe represent only a small proportion of refugees globally and are distinguished by being physically robust enough and having access to sufficient financial resources to undertake an often strenuous and expensive irregular journey.

The global governance system for refugee protection offers little practical guidance on responsibility sharing among host countries. The logic of the 1951 Refugee Convention implies that the first safe country that an asylum seeker reaches is responsible for conducting asylum procedures and, if international protection is granted, for hosting the newly recognized refugee (Mysen 2017). While the Preamble of the 1951 Convention recognizes that some host countries may be overburdened, it merely calls for international cooperation in this case, without guidance as to how responsibility may be shared equitably.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, there is no presumption in the Convention that asylum seekers may freely choose their country of asylum; rather, Article 31(1) of the Convention states that illegal entry into a Contracting State is not to be penalized (only) if asylum seekers come “directly” from a territory where they are persecuted.

Without a mechanism to allocate asylum seekers to host countries (either globally or within the EU), potential host countries that are willing to offer decent reception conditions may be concerned they will receive an excessive number of asylum seekers, ending up overburdened. This concern is exemplified by the large inflow of irregular immigrants into several EU member states, including Sweden and Germany, while they kept their borders relatively open in the autumn of 2015. In this situation, potential host countries face strong incentives to deter asylum seekers by offering less and less favorable reception conditions (or to close their borders to refugees outright like Sweden at end-2015); ultimately, a race to the bottom may develop

among potential host countries in terms of reception conditions. The problematic treatment of irregular immigrants and asylum seekers at the external EU border by several member states (Strik 2019) and the ongoing controversies about search and rescue operations in the southern Mediterranean (Carrera and Cortinovis 2019) reflect attempts by EU member states to limit irregular immigration by whatever means are available to them.

This situation reflects the public goods nature of refugee protection: while all signatory states of the 1951 Convention and their citizens presumably value the fact that persecuted individuals have a right to be protected, they are perfectly content when other countries, rather than they themselves, provide the required protection and bear the associated cost (Hatton 2015). In this sense, a race to the bottom among potential host countries constitutes free-riding behavior that typically arises when the supply of a public good is insufficiently coordinated among producers.

Importantly, in low- and middle-income host countries where most refugees live, such detrimental incentives tend to be less pronounced. International humanitarian and development donors often fund a large share of the fiscal cost of hosting refugees. Given their limited administrative capacity, developing host countries may still find it challenging to ensure access to public services, such as schools and health care, for both refugees and residents. Enough investment in housing and public infrastructure may also be difficult to fund and implement. Yet, with sufficient international support for refugees and host societies, resident populations may even benefit economically from the presence of refugees through higher demand for locally produced goods and services and, consequently, higher real incomes for residents (Luecke and Schneiderheinze 2017). If refugees can live with dignity in their primary host countries, they also have less reason to undertake secondary migration to Europe (Kuschminder and Waidler 2019).

By contrast, individual EU member states face strong incentives to deter asylum seekers from entering their territories: member states are individually responsible for the hosting of asylum seekers and the economic and social integration of recognized refugees, with limited financial support from the EU budget (see section 4.2 below for our proposals for more financial responsibility sharing among EU member states). Furthermore, successive Dublin Regulations have allocated responsibility for receiving asylum seekers and hosting recognized refugees to the member state where asylum seekers first enter EU territory. As a result, southern European member states would

<sup>5</sup> Reportedly, 174,000 Eritrean refugees lived in Ethiopia at end-2018 (Zeit Online 2018), out of just under 600,000 Eritrean refugees worldwide (UNHCR 2019, Annex table 2).

<sup>6</sup> See United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees, UNHCR Communications and Public Information Service, Geneva (2010), 13, <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/basic/3b66c2aa10/convention-protocol-relating-status-refugees.html>.

normally receive a disproportionately large number of asylum seekers, relative to their share of the EU's total population. While this has occurred in small member states, especially Greece, Cyprus, and Malta (see section 4.1 below), other member states have failed to properly register newly arriving immigrants, allowing them to move on to more desirable host countries within the Schengen area. There are also problematic interventions by some member states on the external EU border to deter irregular immigrants and poor reception conditions in other member states (see section 3.2, insight #5 below).

This analysis suggests that policies to limit irregular immigration into Europe while protecting refugees must be designed and implemented in close cooperation with countries of origin and transit. On the one hand, allowing irregular immigration to go ahead unrestricted would overburden those EU member states that would receive most irregular immigrants and asylum seekers. On the other hand, ongoing attempts by EU member states to limit irregular immigration by closing their external borders and ports to asylum seekers conflict with humanitarian standards and may not be sustainable in the medium to long run. Going it alone is simply not a viable strategy in border and migration management for the EU and its member states.

However, it may be politically costly for non-EU countries of origin and transit to cooperate with the EU, especially for the return and readmission of their

citizens who have no right to remain in the EU. After all, irregular migration is often preferable to no migration at all from the point of view of irregular migrants (who would not migrate otherwise) and their countries of origin. Therefore, partner country governments will require meaningful compensation to cooperate with the EU in border and migration management. We argue below that in addition to development cooperation, legal migration opportunities to the EU are one promising area for such cooperation. In the end, the underlying agreements with countries of origin and transit (whatever their formal or informal nature) need to be 'self-enforcing': at all times, each party needs to find it in its own best interest to adhere to all provisions because not fulfilling a particular (inconvenient) commitment would lead to the collapse of the agreement, leaving all parties individually worse off.

■ **Insight #4:** Limiting irregular immigration into the EU while safeguarding refugees' access to protection (either in Europe or in regions of origin) requires close cooperation not only among EU member states, but also with countries of origin and transit. Yet, countries of origin, transit, and destination may have diverging interests with respect to border and migration management. Therefore, cooperation needs to cover a sufficiently wide range of policy areas so that all parties can be sure to benefit, and the underlying agreements become politically sustainable and self-enforcing.

## 3.2 Give and take: Areas of cooperation with countries of origin and transit, especially in Africa

**A**s we have explained in the previous section, it is mainly the EU and its member states that are interested in stricter border and migration management at the EU's external border. To achieve this objective, active support from countries of origin and transit is essential. At the same time, supporting EU efforts to tighten border management is often unpopular in countries of origin and transit. Thus, the EU and its member states may need to make important concessions in other policy areas, including legal migration opportunities, to arrive at politically sustaina-

ble and self-enforcing agreements. In this section, we discuss five insights regarding possible dimensions of EU cooperation with countries of origin and transit, especially in Africa. In section 4 below, we discuss implications for cooperation among EU member states.

■ **Insight #5:** If the EU wants to enforce its visa policy and control the inflow of non-EU nationals into the EU, it needs to work with neighboring countries to limit access to EU territory to those non-EU citizens who have valid travel documents. Otherwise,

particularly if there are no restrictions on irregular travel along the informal Mediterranean migration routes and on subsequent entry into the EU, large numbers of asylum seekers might overwhelm reception capacity in EU member states. Still, given the ongoing abuses at the EU's external border, it must be emphasized that border and migration management must be in line with humanitarian standards and respect migrants' rights.

Allowing only travelers with valid documents to enter the EU may conflict with the safeguarding of access to protection for refugees: after all, some individuals without the necessary travel documents may wish to apply for asylum in the EU and may be recognized as refugees. This dilemma is rooted in the incomplete global system of governance for refugee protection. On the one hand, neither asylum seekers nor recognized refugees are allocated to particular host countries. Individuals can apply for asylum in any country in the world if they can physically reach it. As a result, without restrictions on incoming travel, destination countries with favorable reception conditions for asylum seekers would likely find themselves overwhelmed by large numbers of applicants (a case in point is Sweden in late 2015).

On the other hand, no one has the right to travel to any particular country unless that country allows them in. Accordingly, the most attractive destination countries for asylum seekers, including in the EU, have long sought to restrict incoming travel to individuals with valid travel documents. Visa applicants must convince a visa officer that they do not intend to remain in the destination country beyond the validity of their visa; if an applicant were to indicate that they plan to apply for asylum in the EU, they would almost certainly be denied a visa, irrespective of their individual circumstances.

Short of turning the external EU border into a new Iron Curtain, restrictions on access to EU territory can only be enforced through close security cooperation with neighboring countries and providers of international transport services (such as airlines). The latter face substantial fines if they transport individuals without valid travel documents to the EU (or to many other countries). Under the broad heading of European Integrated Border Management, many neighboring countries work with the EU to combat people smuggling and curb illegal border crossings at the EU's external land border or across the Mediterranean.

Some EU member states have attempted to strengthen control over their external EU borders through national measures, including by shutting

search and rescue vessels out of Italian ports and artificially slowing down the processing of asylum seekers entering Hungary from Serbia and entering Poland from Belarus. In a similar vein, it has been proposed that the EU transfer all asylum seekers to 'disembarkation platforms' (reception centers) in non-EU countries, which (among other things) ignores the fact that most asylum applications are not filed by individuals who have arrived by boat. Some of these measures may not be compatible with humanitarian standards or international law (Strik 2019). They also threaten to undermine cooperation with partner countries by suggesting wrongly that existing challenges can be resolved by EU member states acting unilaterally. Rather, irregular migration, refugee protection, and the safeguarding of migrant rights, including along irregular migration routes, need to be resolved through cooperation and responsibility sharing among EU member states and with countries of origin and transit.

Based on these general principles, several specific challenges need to be addressed. The following three examples illustrate the underlying approach: First, while the closure of the Western Balkan migration route in early 2016 effectively reduced the number of irregular migrants traveling to Central Europe, a significant number of migrants were left stranded along the way without access to asylum procedures, subsistence support, or options for legal employment or assisted return home. There are also persistent reports of human rights violations by border guards when irregular migrants are caught attempting to cross borders. As most Western Balkan countries are candidates for EU accession, the EU is well placed to assist Western Balkan countries in establishing fully functional asylum systems and subsistence support for migrants.<sup>7</sup>

Second, EU cooperation with Turkey has been successful in that Turkey has reduced sharply the number of irregular migrants traveling from Turkey to Greece, while the EU and its member states have supported Turkey as it hosts more than three million refugees from Syria and elsewhere (European Stability Initiative, 2019b). For the EU-Turkey understanding to be sustainable, it will be important, *inter alia*, to strengthen the legal status of refugees in Turkey (including from countries other than Syria) so that rejected asylum seekers can legally be returned to Turkey from the Greek islands. In turn, this will require a reliable, long-term commitment by the EU and its member states to provide financial and technical support for the hosting of refugees in Turkey and for their economic and social integration (see also insight #6 below).

Third, in many African countries, interest in emigration is widespread,<sup>8</sup> especially among young

<sup>7</sup> An early proposal by UNHCR and IOM aims for a regional approach for better refugee protection in the Western Balkans (UNHCR and IOM 2013).

<sup>8</sup> According to the Gallup World Poll (Espova, Pugliese, and Ray, 2018), 33 percent of Sub-Saharan Africans responded affirmatively to the question: 'Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move PERMANENTLY to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?'

people, and emigrants seek out a wide range of destination countries within Africa, in the Gulf region, and in Europe. For many, migration is a step-by-step process where objectives and destination countries may change over time (Crawley et al. 2016). Along the way, migrants not only encounter opportunities to employ their talents and fulfill their aspirations, but also require large amounts of information on alternative options to make good decisions (MEDAM 2018, section 3.1). The EU and its member states can continue to work with countries of origin and transit and international organizations to maintain migrant support and information centers along migration routes to provide objective information on the risks that migrants face as they move ahead, convey a realistic picture of the living conditions of irregular migrants in Europe, point out alternative options for legal migration in Africa or elsewhere, and arrange support for voluntary return home (typically through the International Organization for Migration, IOM) or, possibly, resettlement to non-EU countries (through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR). Experience shows that such support can be provided even in dangerous conditions such as Libya, where it represents a lifeline for migrants stuck in this conflict situation (MEDAM 2018, section 1.2).<sup>9</sup>

In sum, the EU and its member states cannot fill the gaps in the international governance of refugee protection by hosting all the refugees who would like to live in Europe (and have the financial means and access to people smuggling networks to travel to Europe irregularly). In the absence of rules on how asylum seekers and recognized refugees are allocated to host countries (at both the global and the EU levels), the EU and its member states need to negotiate with countries of origin and transit, especially in the EU's neighborhood, on how to share responsibility for curbing irregular migration while ensuring that persecuted individuals have access to protection and safeguarding the rights of all migrants irrespective of their legal status (as confirmed recently by the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration).

**Insight #6:** Low- and middle-income countries host most of the world's refugees. As a matter of humanitarian principle and to discourage secondary migration to the EU, the EU should share actively in the responsibility for protecting these refugees through adequate long-term financial and technical support and by working with host countries to facilitate the refugees' economic and social integration.

If access to the EU for irregular migrants is reduced through joint border management with neighboring

countries (see insight #5 above), this will have a two-fold effect on migrant flows: (i) emigration overall will be lower because one option—irregular migration to the EU—will become more costly and less attractive; and (ii) irregular migrants will be diverted from the EU to other destination countries. In particular, persecuted individuals who might be recognized as refugees if they could reach EU territory will remain in other host countries, which are often poorer than most EU member states (a case in point are Syrians now living in Lebanon or Turkey).

This is a problematic outcome because hosting large numbers of refugees presents several related challenges to developing countries with limited financial and administrative capacity: first, refugees typically require financial support for their subsistence until they are sufficiently integrated into the host economy to earn their own living; second, refugees may rely on public services (schools, health care) or infrastructure (water, sanitation, housing) that are already in short supply; and third, some residents may experience negative wage or price shocks due to labor market competition from refugees.

Importantly, responsibility for protecting refugees can be shared across countries not only by allocating refugees to particular host countries, but also through financial assistance from rich countries to poorer host countries. As discussed in section 3.1 above, adequate financial support would not only cover the subsistence of refugees, but also fund investment in public services and infrastructure. External support would benefit not only refugees, but also residents by generating additional demand for locally produced goods and services (as well as for imports) and raising residents' incomes in the process. The experience of many low- and middle-income host countries that receive external financial support demonstrates that the presence of refugees may even have positive economic effects overall on residents (Luecke and Schneiderheinze 2017).

Already, high-income countries provide substantial humanitarian assistance to refugees and their low- and middle-income host countries through international organizations, especially UNHCR. However, year after year, available humanitarian funding falls short of realistically defined needs. In 2018, funding was available for only 56 percent of total needs, which were calculated at just under US\$25 billion (UN OCHA 2019, 8). Filling this funding gap would be equivalent to harvesting low-hanging fruits: working with other high-income countries, the EU should not find it especially difficult to raise a modest US\$11 billion per year and enable many refugees to live with dignity who now exist in dire circumstances.

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR (2019b) summarizes UNHCR resettlement of vulnerable migrants from Libya via Niger through end-May 2019; IOM (2019) reports on ongoing assistance to migrants in Tripoli through IOM's Voluntary Humanitarian Return program.

Beyond increasing humanitarian assistance, external financial support may also be provided on a long-term basis through development cooperation to ensure that public services, infrastructure, and economic opportunities are available to both refugees and residents. Most refugees live in “protracted” situations as defined by UNHCR: 25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality have been in exile for five consecutive years or more in a given host country (UNHCR 2019, 22–23). Thus, it is now considered good practice in refugee protection to permit and facilitate the full economic and social integration of refugees in their host country (MEDAM 2018, section 3.3). Even so, many developing countries have been reluctant, for fear of hurting residents and generating negative attitudes toward refugees, to allow refugees to fully integrate into the labor market (Zetter and Ruauudel 2016). Recent cooperation between the EU and low-income host countries, including Jordan and Ethiopia, for the full economic integration of refugees (Barbelet et al. 2018), appear promising and point the way toward enhanced engagement in the future.

■ **Insight #7:** Whatever the level of external financial support, small host countries may simply be overburdened by a large number of refugees. In such cases, the EU should participate actively in resettlement schemes for vulnerable refugees.

There may be circumstances when countries of first asylum are overburdened by a large number of refugees and no amount of external support can compensate, for example, for the lack of physical space for housing or the scarcity of other critical resources; Syrian refugees in Lebanon or Rohingyas in Bangladesh may be cases in point. In such situations, resettlement of particularly vulnerable refugees to the EU and other higher-income countries can provide relief. The number of individuals resettled through EU-coordinated programs has grown steadily to just under 25,000 in 2018.<sup>10</sup>

Since 2016, the EU has aimed to establish a permanent resettlement framework under its auspices, complementing a variety of efforts by member states, regional bodies, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Coordinating resettlement efforts at the EU level is a promising approach because the number of slots for resettlement is quite small: for every refugee resettled, many more are bound to remain in the countries of first asylum. Therefore, resettlement may usefully be combined with policies to promote the economic and social integration of refugees in their host countries. To be effective, such policies must be based on joint efforts by host country authorities and the donor community. The EU is often in a better po-

sition than individual member states to negotiate the necessary agreements and ensure that all parties are committed to implementing them. By hosting some refugees, rather than only providing financial support, the EU becomes a more credible participant in such efforts.

■ **Insight #8:** The integrity of the EU asylum system depends on effective procedures for the return and readmission by their countries of origin of non-EU citizens who have no right to remain in the EU. Yet, many countries of origin find it politically difficult to support the involuntary return of their citizens. Despite many agreements on the books, cooperation on return and readmission is often less than smooth in practice. The EU should explore with countries of origin how additional legal migration opportunities, skill partnerships, study visas, etc., can make support for involuntary returns politically sustainable in countries of origin and provide a viable alternative to individuals who might otherwise contemplate irregular migration.

Even if the external EU border is managed well in cooperation with neighboring countries (see insight #5 above), some immigrants will enter the EU irregularly and apply for asylum. Still more asylum applications are filed by individuals who have entered the EU regularly. EU member states need an effective asylum system to respond to the needs of individuals facing persecution while ensuring that those applicants who are not recognized as refugees return to their countries of origin. In the absence of effective procedures for return, the filing of an asylum application would, in practice, allow irregular immigrants to remain in the EU indefinitely—which would defeat the purpose of EU immigration and visa policies.

In countries of origin, however, government support for the involuntary return of their citizens is deeply unpopular (e.g., Zanker and Altrogge 2019). At the individual level, families rely on remittances from emigrants irrespective of legal status. Economy-wide, remittances are an important source of external financing in many developing economies. A large-scale involuntary return of emigrants might also increase unemployment. Consequently, many countries of origin are slow to cooperate with requests for the readmission of their citizens irrespective of any existing agreements.

This state of affairs is unsatisfactory for all stakeholders not least because it has encouraged some EU member states to prevent irregular migrants from entering EU territory in ways that violate humanitarian standards and may be illegal (see the discussion

<sup>10</sup> See European Commission, “Delivering on resettlement: World Refugee Day—20 June 2019,” Brussels (2019), [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20190619\\_managing-migration-factsheet-delivering-resettlement\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20190619_managing-migration-factsheet-delivering-resettlement_en.pdf).

of insight #5 above). A possible way forward lies in all stakeholders recognizing the legitimate interests of (i) EU member states in maintaining the integrity of their visa and immigration policies and implementing effective return and readmission procedures; (ii) countries of origin in not disrupting the inflow of remittances; and (iii) emigrants, irrespective of legal status, in not being uprooted from their host countries where many earn their own living and are well integrated socially and economically.

One approach to reforming relevant policies and practices in line with this logic would consist of these building blocks: first, applying new policies only to irregular migrants who arrive in the EU after a cut-off date (in practice, from now on) and regularizing the legal status of those irregular immigrants who will realistically never be returned to their countries of origin;<sup>11</sup> and second, conditional on active cooperation with return and readmission by each country of origin, expanding opportunities for legal labor migration to the EU with supporting measures to promote language skills and vocational training and to facilitate the social and labor market integration of new immigrants.

Additional legal migration opportunities would need to target low- to medium-skilled workers because high-skilled (university-educated) individuals already face few obstacles migrating to the EU. Under this approach, the purpose of additional legal migration opportunities would not be to address shortages of particular categories of workers in destination countries; rather, the main objective would be to create a political environment conducive to cooperation on border and migration management, especially return and readmission. Furthermore, legal migration opportunities might provide a viable alternative to irregular migration for some individuals—although experience shows that, in and of themselves, legal migration opportunities tend to reduce irregular migration only in a minor way (Barslund, di Salvo and Ludolph, 2019). Rather, legal migration opportunities would be a crucial component of a changed policy mix and irregular migration would be reduced mainly through more effective return and readmission practices.

Hence, programs for additional legal migration to EU member states would be designed with a view to ensuring (only) that immigrants are gainfully employed and provide for their own subsistence on a sustainable basis. A variety of approaches are conceivable and should be explored—from seasonal worker programs to skill partnerships for vocational training in countries of origin that may result in employment either at home or in the EU (Triandafyllidou, Bartolini and Guidi 2019). Given the potential for abuse and

exploitation, it will be important to design programs with appropriate oversight and involve employment agencies and similar bodies to ensure that migrants have access to relevant information, including to resolve disputes with employers, throughout their stay.

A somewhat similar program has been in place in Germany since 2016 (for at least until end-2020) for citizens of Western Balkan countries (Bither and Ziebarth 2018). It was established as part of an understanding with Western Balkan governments in 2015 that involved, among other elements, cooperation in curbing irregular migration to Germany and readmitting failed asylum seekers returning from Germany. Up to 20,000 new work visas are available annually for citizens of Western Balkan countries provided they have an employment contract—which is a much less stringent requirement than is normally applied to job seekers without a university education. The quotas have broadly been filled each year and asylum applications from Western Balkan countries (which are now also considered safe countries of origin by Germany) have declined sharply.

While such bilateral agreements (be they formal or informal) between individual EU member states and non-EU countries may work as intended, the EU has a potentially important role to play in coordinating national offers of slots for legal migration and negotiating on behalf of all member states with non-EU countries: the EU makes the ground rules for the European asylum system and plays an increasingly important part in securing the external border (witness the expansion of Frontex), migration policy, humanitarian aid, and development cooperation. Thus, the EU is involved in many elements of a possible framework for cooperation with non-EU countries on border and migration management (including involuntary return and readmission), vocational training (through development cooperation), and legal labor migration. Although it remains a power of EU member states to determine labor market access for non-EU nationals, the EU should provide guidance and coordination in negotiations with countries of origin and transit toward a shared understanding of the challenges and appropriate policy responses (Barslund et al. 2019).

**Insight #9:** Contrary to earlier studies, our empirical research indicates that income growth in low- and middle-income countries of origin tends to reduce emigration, as does development assistance for better public services and social infrastructure. Nevertheless, the reductions in emigration due to higher income or development assistance are too small to render development cooperation an effective tool to manage emigration.

<sup>11</sup> The European Stability Initiative has made similar proposals with a focus on the Central Mediterranean migration route (European Stability Initiative 2018) and Gambia (European Stability Initiative 2019a).

Many contributors to the public debate on asylum and migration policies in Europe call for measures to 'combat the root causes of migration' in order to reduce irregular migration. The underlying assumption is that development assistance will reduce poverty and thus reduce incentives for irregular emigration. It is clear that this approach addresses mostly mixed migration flows, where many migrants are motivated by economic considerations, rather than forced migration that is mostly due to violent conflict.

The efficacy of this approach has been called into question because, when observed in a cross section of countries, emigration prevalence rises along with per capita income up to a maximum at approximately US\$8,000 per year and then declines at higher income levels (a 'migration hump;' Clemens and Postel 2018). This observation has been rationalized on the grounds that very poor people may be too poor to afford the cost of migrating; only as their incomes rise can they begin to realize their migration intentions. This effect fades at higher income levels where improving living conditions mainly reduce incentives to emigrate and thus emigration prevalence.

If the 'migration hump' accurately describes the evolution of emigration prevalence over time, successful development cooperation that raises per capita income will increase, rather than reduce emigration prevalence because per capita income is below the crucial threshold in most developing countries. In this case, the notion that development cooperation can address the 'root causes' of migration and effectively reduce emigration prevalence would be misguided.

Recent research suggests a more nuanced picture (Lucas 2019, 17-19). Based on a dataset with a time-series as well as a cross-section dimension and controlling for other possible determinants of migration, Benček and Schneiderheinze (forthcoming) find that gross emigration flows consistently decline as GDP rises. Similarly, Lanati and Thiele (2018, 2019) find that higher development assistance is associated with lower emigration prevalence overall; this effect is larger when development cooperation is targeted at public services and social infrastructure rather than income growth and when the statistical analysis is restricted to 'transferred aid' (excluding, for example, support for refugees from developing countries hosted by the donor country). Once again, this effect is small: doubling development assistance would reduce emigration prevalence by only 15 percent.

This discussion suggests that development cooperation may be a useful tool to pursue other policy objectives, but it is not suited to managing irregular migration to the EU. Migration from low-income to high-income countries needs to be managed closely to ensure that migrants are well integrated into the labor market at destination and their presence benefits all stakeholders. Targeted measures like skill partnerships may be part of the institutional framework of development cooperation, but their usefulness would be based on the skills transmitted, rather than on their impact on per capita income. Development assistance would also not help to avoid the difficult decisions to be made in enforcing asylum decisions and visa policies, including the involuntary return of individuals who have no right to stay in the EU.