POLICY BRIEFING

Mediterranean Migration
Research Programme
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Dynamics of migration across the Mediterranean

Evidence from the Mediterranean Migration Research Programme (MMRP) on the dynamics of migration to Europe in 2015 and 2016 challenges dominant assumptions about the relationship between so-called 'push' and 'pull' factors which underpin the EU policy response. Journeys and routes are often fluid, fragmented or protracted with multiple opportunities for policy intervention that go beyond border control.

About the research

During 2015 and 2016 nearly 1.4 million people are estimated to have crossed the Mediterranean to Europe. Nearly 9,000 people are estimated to have died trying to make this journey. Evidence from MMRP research suggests that the EU policy response has been underpinned by assumptions about the dynamics of migration and the nature of journeys and routes to Europe. This includes the assumption that migration is driven primarily by poverty in countries of origin and that refugees and migrants decide to come to Europe primarily because of the possibility of accessing jobs and welfare support. The MMRP's findings challenge these assumptions. It is clear that conflict and human rights abuse – most notably Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Eritrea - was the primary factor contributing to the increased arrival of refugees and migrants in 2015 and 2016. Localised, familial and gender based conflict was also a driver of migration from other countries.

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Policy implications

● EU policy failures in relation to increased migration across the Mediterranean are partly failures of implementation but also reflect flawed assumptions about the reasons why people move and the factors shaping their journeys to Europe.

● The EU has focused almost exclusively on policies designed to contain refugees and migrants in countries and regions of origin at the expense of addressing the reception and protection needs of those arriving from situations of conflict, persecution and human rights abuse. The focus needs to shift towards improving access to rights (including international protection), security and socioeconomic opportunities in countries hosting significantly larger numbers of refugees and migrants.

● MMRP researchers found no evidence that asylum and migration policies, beyond the ability to secure protection, are significant factors influencing the intended destinations of refugees and migrants. The presence of families/friends in EU countries and overall economic opportunities are more significant factors. Many were unaware of deterrence policies such as detention and deportation. These are therefore unlikely to have their intended effect.

● MMRP researchers found clear evidence that smuggling is driven, rather than broken, by EU policy. The closure of borders appears to have significantly increased the demand for, and use of, smugglers who have become the only option for those unable to leave their countries or enter countries in which protection might potentially be available to them.

● There is an urgent need to significantly expand safe and legal routes for protection. This includes significantly expanding current resettlement programmes, increasing humanitarian visas or

About the research *continued*

The pressures that cause people to leave their homes and, ultimately, their countries are likely to persist. There has been growing awareness within the EU policy, development and trade, yet the focus at the EU level has been very firmly on border controls and on preventing people from entering Europe, for example through the EU-Turkey agreement and ongoing negotiations in relation to Libya.

Although some refugees and migrants arrive in Europe soon after leaving their home countries (less than three months), most do not. Many try to make a life elsewhere, moving on only when they feel that they have exhausted the possibilities. Others stop for longer periods to build resources and social contacts to assist with the onward journey. The nature of journeys, which are often fluid, fragmented or protracted, makes it increasingly difficult for policy makers to differentiate between 'refugees' and 'economic migrants'.

Many refugees and migrants do not leave their home countries intending to come to Europe, or particular EU Member States, but move onwards due to violence, insecurity and a lack of protection as well as limited opportunities to rebuild a life. This is particularly clear for those who moved initially to Libya, Iran and the Sudan.

The nature of journeys, which are often fluid, fragmented or protracted, makes it increasingly difficult for policy makers to differentiate between 'refugees' and 'economic migrants'.

Although refugees and migrants are sometimes able to exercise agency in decision making they often do so within a limited range of options. Many refugees and migrants were not heading to a particular destination. The decision of some people to travel to one country rather than another was shaped by an array of complex factors. The possibility of securing protection was the most important reason for wanting to get to Europe. Other factors included the presence of family members, speaking the language and the (actual or perceived) economic prosperity and labour market needs of particular countries. Accurate information about specific asylum and migration policies was limited or non-existent.

Many refugees and migrants used smugglers to leave their countries of origin where travel is dangerous or border

Policy implications *continued*

temporary protection for those coming from conflict and war and increasing the scale of family reunification.

- Because of the complex factors that underpin the decision to leave home countries and the increasingly fluid, fragmented or protracted nature of journeys, eligibility for international protection cannot be determined by nationality alone. Other migrants also have rights under national, EU and international law. These cannot be disregarded.

- There is a need for rights-orientated information campaigns that mobilise social networks in order to offer clear and accurate information on admission and asylum processes. The aim of such campaigns should be protection rather than deterrence.

crossings prohibited. The vast majority also use smugglers to cross borders at different points on their journey. The absence or slow realisation of safe and legal access to protection (for example, through work and study visas, refugee resettlement and family reunification) increases the demand for the illicit services provided by smugglers and, in turn, exposure to violence and crime.

There is extensive evidence of violence – including beatings, kidnappings, forced labour and arbitrary detention – experienced by refugees and migrants along the entirety of their journeys – including within Europe. Many respondents had witnessed death through starvation, violence or drowning. This violence takes place at the hands of smugglers, fellow travellers and agents of the state, including police and border guards. Refugees and migrants are prepared to risk violence and death because they do not believe there any alternatives available to them.

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About the research *continued*

Although the number of refugees and migrants arriving across the Mediterranean in recent years is higher than at any other time, there are significantly more refugees from countries such as Syria in other countries, most notably Turkey (3 miliion), Lebanon (1 million) and Jordan (650,000). Political, public and media anxiety about migration to Europe reflects deep seated political tensions within and between EU Member States and in relation to the institutional structures for the management of migration. The policy response would benefit from improved data on the ground and greater political leadership at an institutional level.

Key findings

● The vast majority of people migrate across the Mediterranean by boat because they believe that their lives are in danger and/or that there is no future for themselves (and their children) in countries of origin and transit.

● Migration into Europe during 2015 and 2016 was made up of distinct 'sub-flows' from many countries and regions and includes individuals with diverse trajectories. These flows merged in Turkey and Libya.

● Conflict in countries such as Syria was a major factor contributing to the significant increase in the number of refugees and migrants arriving in 2015 and 2016.

● People's migration trajectories are varied. Many people have previously been displaced or have been migrating for long periods of time. These longer trajectories are important in understanding the dynamics of migration into and through Europe.

● Countries such as Libya, Iran and Sudan were originally destination countries for many refugees and migrants who crossed the Mediterranean to Europe. People moved on due to a lack of security including forced labour, violence, arbitrary detention and kidnappings, torture, and general lawlessness.

● Many respondents witnessed death or experienced violence during their migration. Experiences of violence and death were not limited to the sea crossing but could be found along the entire route.

● Changes to migration policies and increased border controls have led to fluid, fragmented or protracted journeys and make it increasingly difficult for people to safely and legally access protection and employment.

● The absence of legal routes to reach the EU has fuelled the demand for smugglers and has pushed people to undertake dangerous crossings resulting in increased violence and loss of life.

● Refugees and migrants have only partial information about migration policies in particular countries. Information sharing is dynamic and unpredictable and it occurs more frequently en route rather than at origin, often in a haphazard manner.

● Social media networks can be important in maintaining family links when families are separated during their journey, and to aid confirmation of death and access to the remains of those who die crossing the Mediterranean.

References and further information

For information about the Mediterranean Migration Research Programme, including the methodology and evidence base for the research, see:
www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/mmrp/about/

• Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by boat: Final Project Report
• Destination Europe? Understanding the dynamics and drivers of Mediterranean migration in 2015
• Documenting the migration crisis in the Mediterranean: spaces of transit, migration management and migrant agency
• Death by rescue: the lethal effects of the EU's policies on non-assistance