

EU Response to the Migration Crisis: Too Little, But Not Too Late

As it faces mounting criticism over its lacklustre response to the migration emergency in the Mediterranean, the EU needs a plan to address causes as well as symptoms of the crisis.

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The causes of the migration crisis in the Mediterranean are multiple and complex. Rather than just attempting to alleviate its symptoms, the EU must address them to protect migrants, safeguard the Schengen zone and act as a force for good in the world. Large flows of refugees and economic migrants who are unable to enter the EU through regular routes seek the help of people smugglers to enter the EU. Smugglers have been able to operate with impunity in the wake of [Libyan state collapse](#) and operate dangerous routes and dangerous practices of travel. Incoherent EU policies on Schengen solidarity and refugee resettlement have led to a muddled and ineffective response, which is informed by xenophobic discourse and is an insult to the EU's history and values. [Failure to establish offshore asylum-processing](#) and inadequate Search and Rescue (SAR) efforts have compounded the situation. After a disappointing first response, the EU needs to formulate short, medium and long term plans to address the causes of the crisis.

Analysis: Short, medium and long-term plans needed to tackle causes & symptoms of crisis

In the **Short-Term**, EU's priority must be to stop migrant deaths at sea, while respecting its commitments to allow people to seek asylum in its member states. However, the EU must also protect the integrity of its own borders as this guarantees the viability of the Schengen zone – one of its most significant and popular achievements of European integration. The reinforced Triton operation offers enhanced border protection but needs to be accompanied by a naval mission dedicated to search and rescue (SAR), to prevent migrant boats reaching the high seas and to transferring migrants to [offshore processing centres](#), which [should be established](#).

The uneven willingness of EU member states to share the burdens (as well as the benefits) of Schengen – through refugee resettlement and support to states facing extreme migratory pressure – is a problem that needs to be addressed. If EU-wide agreement cannot be reached, then coalitions of the willing need to be found to act. However, in the medium-term, those [states that benefit from free movement](#) need to take their fair share of responsibility for dealing with the burdens of shared borders. If they do not, then their participation in Schengen needs to be re-considered – by the states in question and by the EU.

In the **Medium-Term**, the EU needs to act to address the limited supply of possibilities for regular movement into the EU for economic or lifestyle migrants, including low-skilled workers in search of a better life. To do this it will need to challenge increasingly dominant discourses that see migration only as a burden or as a threat, and which are often based on xenophobic attitudes that are anathema to the EU's values and history. The dominance of border and law

enforcement agencies in producing knowledge about migration – including through their emphasis on ‘Risk Analysis’ - needs to be balanced by proper consideration of the contributions migrants make and the opportunities and benefits they bring. There will not be room for all those who want to come but the EU should facilitate greater regular mobility while preventing irregular mobility.

In the **Longer-Term**, the EU needs to reduce demand for inward migration by helping to address the causes of forced migration. The Union should employ the full spectrum of foreign policy instruments at its disposal to address the conflict and suffering that drive migration. It should redouble its support for social, political and economic development so that people no longer *have* to move elsewhere to lead normal lives, but should ensure that those who still choose to move have some possibility to do so.

Outlook: A battle ahead but a slim chance for a better plan

Hopes that the EU had found the political will to finally deal effectively with the longstanding crisis on its doorstep were dashed last week by an [insufficient plan](#) that focused on border protection, smuggling networks and fingerprinting and returning migrants – and by [the failure to agree to implement](#) even the meagre provisions for refugee resettlement [previously presented](#). UN [Chief Ban-Ki-Moon](#) also condemned EU Proposals for military action against people smugglers.

Ahead of a plenary session on 29 April, [European Parliamentarians](#) from the Socialists, Greens and Left Groups [demanded that the EU do more](#), but seemingly faced opposition from the EPP and ECR factions. Several large member states, such as Germany and Italy, have thrown their weight behind the possibility of establishing offshore asylum-processing centres and a full-fledged SAR operation, which the UK, Sweden and Belgium have pledged to support through provision of naval and air capacity. There is currently no consensus on refugee re-settlement, but this will remain a prominent agenda item. The EU is effectively waiting for the next disaster to happen as criticism of its inaction mounts. Many within the EU want to change this, but they face a battle ahead.

Recommendations:

- ◆ **Short Term:** (1) establish offshore asylum processing centres in North Africa; (2) launch a dedicated EU Naval Mission to conduct Search and Rescue (SAR), prevent migrant boats reaching the high seas and escort/transport migrants to processing centres; (3) reinforce Frontex’s Triton operation to strengthen the integrity of the EU’s Southern border; (4) Reach an agreement on Refugee Resettlement either EU-wide or through a coalition of the willing.
- ◆ **Medium-Term:** (1) Intervene strongly into the public debate on migration and mobility to counter the xenophobic discourse and false perceptions of threats and burdens created by migrants; (2) Create a system of Opportunity Analysis to countervail Risk Analysis; (3) Conclude Schengen-wide (and EU-wide) burden-sharing agreements on refugee resettlement and border protection; (4) Provide increased regular routes into the EU for economic/lifestyle migrants, shared proportionally across member states.
- ◆ **Long Term:** (1) The revised European Security Strategy and European Neighbourhood Policy should include coherent provisions to support conflict transformation and the alleviation of suffering in war-torn or disaster-hit areas to reduced forced migration; (2) A co-ordinated strategy for promoting economic, social and political development in key migration origin countries should be developed.

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