

Notes from the conference *Sustainable Migration in Europe*

Norway House, Brussels, 13th December 2018

Introduction

Øyvind Jaer, EMN Norway

Sustainable migration is a new concept rapidly gaining interest. Given the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Agenda, many understand “*migration*” as a process leading to sustainable *development* in poor countries. Social scientists alike, have, in the light of globalisation and the theory of comparative advantage seen migration as a positive and globally efficient system.

Does the theory of comparative advantage also work for migration? Not according to Professor Paul Collier’s latest work *The Future of Capitalism*, (2018). Whether migration is a globally efficient system is an empirical question. What seems clear, however, is that migration and its consequences are contributing to the anxieties faced by many in this current phase of capitalism.

In November 2017, EMN Norway commissioned Professors Paul Collier and Alexander Betts to develop a definition of sustainable migration, as well as a sustainable migration framework, to help inform research, policy debate and policy development regarding migration from poor to rich countries. In the terms of reference we referred to Collier’s book *Exodus* (2013) where it is stated: Whether «‘*migration is good or bad?*’... *is the wrong question ... the pertinent question is how much...and what kind of composition ... is best.*» (*Exodus p. 26 and p. 260*). If we also add “**how fast**”, then we have the three basic questions giving *The Sustainable Migration Approach* a direct political relevance. Collier and Bett’s work *Refuge* from 2017 extends *Exodus’* sustainable migration perspectives to refugee policy, as they make the case for regional solutions to refugee flows.

The Sustainable Migration Approach should be a comprehensive approach which, in principle, considers all interests involved in relation to i) countries of origin, ii) regional havens and iii) host countries. Sustainability analyses should also be done in relation to economic, social and cultural variables.

Our hope was that this conference would provide a useful platform for new ideas in relation to the EU’s Comprehensive approach to migration and to the “gap statement” in the Commission’s recent Communication dated 4.12.2018¹ where it is stated on page 2 that “...*we have not yet built a sustainable system capable of preventing and mitigating future challenges.*”

Magnus Ovilius, European Commission

The recent influx of migrants has taught Europe important lessons. Overall, the EU has done well – it has provided refuge, saved lives, resettled refugees, broken criminal smuggling and trafficking networks and built up a better return system. For example, some 720k refugees had been settled in Europe - three times as many as in Canada, US and Australia combined. Still, migration is a highly politicised and emotional issue. It evokes sympathy as well as fear. Magnus noted that something was lacking from the Brussels framework on migration – namely how can the necessary trust be obtained from EU citizens, and further, from people in third countries? If migration is not acceptable to all parties, then it cannot be sustainable.

¹ COM(2018) 798 final

To ensure the trust of citizens and third countries, migration must be managed and regulated well. Policymakers need to engage more with the public and policies need to withstand public scrutiny. The issues are complex, so information must be accessible and impartial. In this light, the EMN can have an important role to play. The current conference represented a starting point to begin to address such issues.

Sustainable migration in Europe

Paul Collier, University of Oxford

Collier noted that migration remained the most salient topic across Europe even though the numbers of migrants were falling. Why so salient? Because national authorities had lost the trust of their populations many of whom felt that migration policies were 'out of control'. To address the present situation, the starting point is not to be reactive, but to be strategic – where do we want to end up, and what should be the basic features of the system we want to establish?

Sustainable *economic* migration is based on the notion that obligations should be reciprocal. Obligations are accepted because both parties expect to be better off. This approach however does not apply in the same way in cases of *forced* migration. Rather than reciprocity, this type of migration gives rise to the **duty of rescue**. Another duty of rescue is towards the 'bottom billion' in the poorest and most vulnerable countries. Duties of rescue are not dependent on what refugees or the 'bottom billion' can do for us. It is a moral, non-reciprocal obligation to provide assistance. To fulfil duties towards both categories of rescue, migration to Europe is not necessarily the optimum response.

Sustainable migration must be based on a **democratic mandate/support** from the host population and should result in **no regret** for all parties when the consequences of migration materialise in the future. For example, young unemployed Africans in Italy may find that they have responded to an exaggerated 'fantasy' of Europe and come to regret their migration decision if it does not meet their expectations.

Alexander Betts, University of Oxford

Betts went on to discuss how we as richer countries can create sustainable sanctuaries in third countries, which meet the three criteria above. What would such sanctuaries look like? The international response has so far been to provide humanitarian aid in camps. This approach however puts lives on hold – in some cases for many years. We have to move on towards a more development-oriented approach, which can be more effective in building sustainable solutions for refugees as well as host societies.

In Jordan for example, the *Jordan Compact* gives the right to work to Syrian refugees. Following concessions from the EU plus financing, now 100,000 Syrians have the right to work in Jordan. Uganda operates a self-reliance strategy allowing refugees freedom of movement and the right to work. Kenya recently opened the Kalobeyei settlement, which is market-based and settles refugees alongside host populations. When compared to refugee schemes where the right to work is denied, Uganda and Kalobeyei showed many significant benefits and Kenya has adopted the Kalobeyei model to be taken up more widely. The funds that are invested from donors (World Bank and EU) for such developments, have also had wider positive impacts for the local host populations. Refugee camps in third countries may be good starting points for the application of EU development policies

that can bring changes. If refugees are given opportunities for work and autonomy, then most of them will not embark on dangerous secondary migration journeys towards Europe.

Betts also discussed resettlement as another route out of limbo. New models must be considered, for example the Canadian model on private sponsorship, which allows for host country citizens' preferences to be taken into the mix. Matching of refugees with labour market and other needs can also work to ensure that the needs and preferences of hosting country and migrant are better matched.

Paul Collier

Many young people from African countries have come to believe that they do not have a future in African countries. 'Europe or death' are seen as the only viable options. Rescuing young people from the sea and then granting refuge in Europe tends to reinforce this message. Changing this narrative and persuading young people that African countries can offer a viable future must be a core goal. But the population in Africa is increasing by 10m each year while jobs are being created only at 2m per year. How can the EU best support African countries to address this issue?

One solution is to move jobs to people rather than people to jobs. Africa is short of firms and the skills and capacity to run larger firms. EU-based firms can establish branches in African countries. Some Member States prefer to seek opportunities in eastern countries such as Turkey rather than looking to the countries of Africa, yet China has aggressively been involved in commercial ventures in African countries. There is no overall EU strategy that joins up the activities of the different EU actors dealing with policies for migration, trade, investment, humanitarian aid, international development, skills and employment etc. to make the experience more joined up for Africa.

Migration plays a part in the development of countries in Africa through the transfer of skills, remittances etc. – but these countries do not want to lose their brightest and most talented people to other countries. Circular migration could be one way of bringing a 'triple win' situation to countries of origin and destination and for migrants themselves, rather than long term migration. The EU Seasonal Workers' Directive (2014) is a recent tool that could contribute in this area.

Alexander Betts

To support the sustainable migration framework, five key questions must be addressed:

1. **How should asylum decisions be made?** EU policy for distinguishing between refugees and aspirational migrants must be consistent across time and space, otherwise the inconsistencies undermine public trust and create perverse incentives for migrants (asylum shopping etc.).
2. **Where should asylum decisions be made?** Some decision-making for asylum cases should still be available within the EU, but in many cases asylum procedures could be carried out in consulates in third countries.
3. **How should responsibility be shared?** Europe will also need to rethink the Dublin system for distributing refugees within the EU. Preference and matching systems could be applied.
4. **How should Europe deal with boats?** The EU must save lives at sea, but by separating disembarkation from potential destination, i.e. through non-EU disembarkation points. This could meet human rights obligations and prevent people taking life threatening journeys.

5. **How to make return work?** Return policies must be more effective and there is a need to identify people in an irregular situation who abscond. Opportunities for return to other third countries in the region of the country of origin could be explored.

In conclusion, Betts stressed that in his view migration would define Europe's future. Migration is not a 'Home Affairs' issue alone – it must work alongside policies supporting economic and social development, security, trade etc. too. Professor Betts called for better policy coherence.

Absorption Capacity as means for assessing Sustainable Immigration

Grete Brochmann, University of Oslo

How to operationalise sustainable migration? One possible tool could be the concept of absorption capacity. Absorption capacity is political, but can also be used as a device to assist in analysis. The concept takes seriously the idea that there is a limit to how many newcomers a receiving country can 'absorb' without risking institutional overload and political backlash. During the refugee crisis, absorption became a critical issue, and more restrictive approaches to migration have grown from perceptions of the limits of absorption capacity. Political sustainability is linked to stability and trust, but based on the rate, volume and composition of immigration which impact on absorption capacity.

Whilst there is no unitary relationship between immigration and the welfare state, there is diversity across Europe in the context into which migrants are to be 'absorbed', for example, the liberal Anglo-Saxon model; the conservative continental model; and the social democratic Scandinavian model. These models apply in different ways depending on the categories of migrants who are entitled to different rights and benefits. Immigration regime, relations between labour market and welfare state institutions, all impact on a state's absorption capacity.

Research professor Anne Skevik Grødem, Institute for social research, Oslo

Access to the labour market in high productivity economies is problematic for low skilled workers. Third country migrants seeking international protection are mostly low skilled. In many cases migration results in high unemployment rates and high use of welfare systems, something which can set in place spirals that drive issues for host populations. How can these issues be addressed?

Social investment is one solution – universal basic education and free, subsidised higher education, plus opportunities for re-training etc. Norway is a stable and affluent country with low economic inequality and solid education institutions. Many migrant descendants enter the national education system, enter employment and adapt to the values of the host country. Political sustainability is a consideration too. Are there any links between immigration and changing attitudes towards the welfare state? To date no strong relationship has been established, but local effects are apparent in some areas and local resilience has been identified from some groups. Can absorption rates be improved through welfare-state reform? If the influx of migrants is higher than an existing welfare state can sustain, then reforms will need to be considered, for example, higher tax / lower benefits, for some or for all.

The consideration of absorption capacity is a conceptual approach, not an analytical instrument. It is a concept that acknowledges that there is a limit to how many newcomers, which can be absorbed, and as such can be considered a heuristic tool that leads the way to better discussion.

The significance of culture in assessing sustainable migration

Asle Toje

Culture impacts on immigration as well as integration. Diasporas can act as a long term pull factor for more migrants. Integrated/assimilated migrants do not have this pull effect. Trends suggest that groups from some countries integrate more quickly than others. By undermining the cultural aspects of migration elites have got themselves into trouble. How can migrants who might attract less negativity from host population and increase integration be 'chosen' by host communities? Culture must be carefully considered.

Maintaining public trust is one of the key variables. There are examples of significant falls in the levels of trust and in support for welfare models following the migration crisis. Cultural differences can bring challenges to current societies. Re-forging of national attitudes in some countries has bred right-wing extremism. In summary, "culture" is a significant variable in assessing sustainable migration.

The debate

The debate opened with panellists reflecting on how to establish the middle ground in a polarised debate; this was in huge demand in the context of finding sustainable ways forward for Europe. Absorption capacity helps to understand that there are limits. Culture is important. Some aspects of culture can result in damaging behaviours which may create high levels of mistrust. Dysfunctional cultural traits can be imported with the migrants themselves. How to approach this issue without crossing the line into racism and xenophobia?

One panellist referred to research in Norway on second generation migrants' values, which to a significant degree approximate the situation of the majority. Why? This was in the main attributed to Norway's immigration policies, which determine where migrants are allowed to settle. Migrants are dispersed across the country, in contrast to Sweden, where migrants can choose where they reside, something which can result in "cultural concentration" in diasporas, 'ghettos/parallel societies'.

One panellist raised the issue of the relation between social capital and social cohesion. Singapore for example, was built on a model of shared identity and shared cooperation. New divisions based on poverty have now appeared. Significant social polarisations have resulted. How can such polarisation be prevented? This point was salient to the main issue of the discussion on sustainable migration. What degree of cultural difference and social complexity/inequality can be accepted by policy makers and tolerated by the public?

Sustainable migration also encompasses the notion of the role of the EU and rich countries in creating opportunities for poorer countries – the duty of rescue for the "bottom billion". One panellist revisited the idea of circular migration as an important tool to share the economic benefits of migration opportunities in the short term to a wider number of people.

Closing

Magnus Ovilius closed the event, reporting that the EMN would launch a series of 'round tables' on challenging issues, and these would increasingly bring representatives from third countries into the discussion. It was important to understand how policies can work from all perspectives, and how a

means of communication can be found to enable this to happen. This conference was not about policy- and decision-making, but about exchanging views on challenging topics. As a provider of impartial evidence, the EMN is establishing itself as an effective forum for such discussions.

Attachments:

- Invitation and program
- Presentation of speakers
- *Introduction*, by conference chair Øyvind Jaer
- *Sustainable Migration Framework*, paper by Paul Collier and Alexander Betts
- *Sustainable Migration in Europe*, paper by Paul Collier and Alexander Betts.
- *Absorption Capacity as means for assessing Sustainable Immigration*, PPT by Grete Brochmann and Anne Skevik Grødem