

EMN Norway Occasional Papers  
**Sustainable Migration  
Framework**

Alexander Betts  
Paul Collier

University of Oxford, 2018



Norwegian Ministry  
of Justice and Public Security

**UDI** Utlendingsdirektoratet  
Norwegian Directorate  
of Immigration

## Executive Summary

- European societies are deeply divided on migration. The European ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015-16 was not a crisis of numbers so much as a crisis of politics and, increasingly, a crisis of trust. The way in which it was narrated by many politicians has led to rising populism from both the extreme Right and Left. And that polarisation shows little sign of abating.
- Mainstream European politicians urgently need a common vision and a unifying language that will resonate with electorates while leading to sound migration policies. The key place to start is with ethics. Politicians can and should claim the moral high ground; to show that their migration policies are based on coherent and justifiable underpinnings. To ensure this, we need common principles; to articulate what moral obligations we do and do not have.
- Our Sustainable Migration framework offers this starting point. Its purpose is to find a common and unifying language, one that can be ethically grounded and politically engaged. A sustainable policy in any field is one that can endure, and not be subject to constant renegotiation and replacement. Across Europe we see myriad examples of unsustainability: from the change in Germany’s refugee policies over time to growing electoral success for populist parties in several countries.
- Sustainable migration policies must satisfy three simple conditions: meet our basic ethical obligations, have broad democratic support, and not lure people into decisions they will come to regret. If policies deviate from these criteria, they are liable to come unstuck.
- In terms of our basic ethical obligations, we have to distinguish between our reciprocal obligations and our non-reciprocal obligations. Rich countries have non-reciprocal obligations in two main areas: to help poor societies around the world to develop; and to help refugees fleeing conflict and persecution. But we do not have such non-reciprocal obligations to economic migrants. We can always offer to create reciprocal obligations with economic migrants: they arise from transactional relationships of mutual gain, designed to be in the long-term interests of all parties: host societies, the population continuing to live in countries-of-origin, and those who migrate.
- ‘No regrets’ is also an important principle. Too often receiving or sending societies, and migrants themselves come to regret ill-considered choices. We need to ensure our policies

are ones we will be glad we put in place five or ten years later. Regrets can arise because of political backlash in receiving states; because poor countries find themselves stripped of their human capital; and because migrants find themselves tempted into journeys based on false hopes. If a policy generates any of these regrets, it has been imprudent.

- Finally, democratic legitimacy is key. Unless electorates back migration policies they will unravel. Recognizing likely tipping points in public opinion can avert backlash, and ensure policies that meet our ethical obligations and our long-term interests can endure. Manifestly, the chaotic nature of European public policy on these issues since 2015, and the resulting collapse in public trust in leaders, suggests that a more considered and precautionary approach is essential.
- The application of these principles, and the thresholds for backlash and unsustainability, will vary by context. Welfare-solidarist societies like the Nordic states, liberal societies like the UK, and hierarchical societies like the Gulf States, for example, have fundamentally different cultural, political, and economic structures, which shape what sustainability will mean across time and place.
- We illustrate the types of policies that might be available in order to shape a sustainable migration approach within and beyond Europe. We outline policies within the broad categories of 'economic migration' and 'refugees', a distinction we argue to be ethically sound and politically necessary, despite the complexities of mixed migration.
- In terms of economic migration, policy-makers need to take the emerging challenge of 'aspirational migration' seriously, recognising that increased development assistance alone does not stop migration. Instead, more nuanced approaches need to create ways to reshape narratives, networks, and meaning, transforming aspirations from a logic of 'entitled consumption' to one of 'empowered production'. In order to sustainably meet labour market needs, greater consideration should be given to the role of circular migration schemes.
- In terms of refugees, the key place to start is to create development opportunities for the 85% of the world's refugees in low and middle-income countries, creating employment and education opportunities that reduce the need for secondary movement. Properly done, this will alleviate pressure on the asylum system. But we also outline ways to improve the

sustainability of asylum and resettlement in Europe. The ideas we suggest, relating to asylum, include predictable and consistent decision-making outcomes within and outside Europe, and separating state responsibility for assessment from responsibility for settlement and integration. With regards to resettlement, we discuss the role of preference matching and private sponsorship.

# Sustainable Migration:

## A Framework for Responding to Movement from Poor to Rich Countries

Alexander Betts and Paul Collier<sup>1</sup>

### 1 Introduction

Around the Western world, politics has been convulsed by disagreements over migration. Our societies are polarised between people who see it as the moral duty of rich societies to welcome people from poorer ones, and people who are fearful that mass immigration will undermine their jobs and their culture. Disagreements have spiralled into mutual vilification, shattering conventional politics. In France and Italy, both of the major conventional parties have been pushed to the margins; in Germany a new party of the radical right is the new opposition; in America Donald Trump usurped the Republican primaries and is now President; in Britain the Brexit vote has led to political chaos. Across all these elections, immigration has been the central mobilising tool for the popular nationalists.

And yet international mobility is a normal, and usually modest, aspect of behaviour. By an overwhelming majority, most people remain in the country of their birth: overall levels of migration as a proportion of the world's population have remained at around 3% for the last half century. There has been no dramatic increase in this proportion, although since 1970, partly reflecting population growth, absolute numbers of migrants have increased from 70m in 1970 to around 260m, and the composition of migrants arriving in Europe has changed significantly. Migration can be a force for good, often bringing economic, social, and cultural benefits to both sending and receiving states and societies. Businesses across Europe need workers and most rely upon importing them: British employers face a 15% workforce shortfall after Brexit. Many developing countries receive more in remittances than they do in foreign direct investment: for Gambia and Liberia, remittances

---

<sup>1</sup> The authors are grateful to EMN Norway for commissioning this paper. We are especially grateful for the generous feedback on earlier drafts and suggestions made by Øyvind Jaer, Magne Holter, and Stina Holth. We presented a first draft of the paper at an EMN conference in Oslo on 21 July 2018. We are grateful to all of the attendees for invaluable feedback, particularly Jorgen Carling, Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen, Grete Brochmann, Magnus Ovilus, Tor Mikkell Wara, and Terje Sjeggstad. As with any working paper, the paper represents work in progress, and it should be read as part of the authors' evolving reflections on the concept of sustainable migration. We welcome ongoing feedback, debate, and discussion as we seek to improve the ideas and to build consensus on a framework for sustainable migration.

represent over 20% of GDP. Mobility can enable the people who move to access employment and education, be reunited with family members, and seek sanctuary from conflict.

But to achieve these benefits, migration policies must be sustainable. Sustainability means the ability to endure over time. The policy challenge is to safeguard the benefits of migration while avoiding the kind of destabilising backlashes that increasingly characterise the politics of migration. To achieve this requires public confidence that rules are just, effective, and can endure.

In Europe, migration policies have not been sustainable. They have been characterised by reactive shifts, struggling to maintain the public trust required for continuity. One by one, Europe's open-door policies have brought backlash and lurched towards protectionism and exclusion. Angela Merkel's brief flirtation with *wir schaffen das* during the 2015-16 refugee 'crisis' was met with almost immediate backlash, heralding a volte-face of extraordinary proportions as an open door became a closed door in just 6-months, with a legacy of empowerment for the Far Right unrivalled in the country's recent history. Merkel herself proclaimed in 2018: "We were always proud of freedom of movement but we never really thought about protecting our external borders. Now we're working on our entry-exit system".<sup>2</sup> By June 2018, Merkel had reintroduced border controls along the Austrian border. And she was far from alone in issuing a *mea culpa* for unsustainable policies.

In the early 2000s, politics in Nordic countries was dominated by social democratic governments with relatively liberal asylum policies and generous social integration policies for migrants. The politics of migration has virtually wiped the centre-left off Scandinavia's electoral map, amid fears of the erosion of welfare states. With immigration rates more than doubling in fifteen years, the leader of the Danish Social Democrats recently called for a renewal of the social contract to bridge the divide between cosmopolitan elites and those left behind, "When you enter Sweden, Norway, or Denmark you have the right to almost anything from day one...It's a difficult system to combine with a lot of people coming. Otherwise our system isn't going to stick together".<sup>3</sup>

Much of the backlash in Europe has been caused by economic alienation, with anti-immigration sentiment being driven by concern with structural economic change. The areas with the highest voting shares for Brexit and the Far Right in Germany and France were not those with the highest

---

<sup>2</sup> New Europe (2018), 'Davos 2018: Merkel Offers Veiled Mea Culpa Over Immigration', <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/migration-merkel-makes-veiled-mea-culpa-davos-regrets-brexit>

<sup>3</sup> Financial Times (2017), 'Denmark's Centre-Left Seeks Common Ground With Populists', 7 July 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/f73883a6-621e-11e7-91a7-502f7ee26895>

immigration numbers; they were those afflicted by the recent collapse of labour-intensive manufacturing jobs. These trends are about to be exacerbated by the implications of automation, which will transform the future of work. While Europe currently needs workers to address demographic shortages; it may soon not have enough jobs to go around. It is estimated that within two decades, tens of millions of European jobs will be lost to automation.

And the challenge is not just here. Low and middle-income countries face the consequences of the rich world cherry picking their highly skilled. The balance between benefitting from remittances and losing from brain drain is a precarious one for poor countries. At the extremes, though, there are clear examples of unsustainability. For example, there are more Sudanese doctors in Britain than in Sudan. Yet this is not a triumph of mobility and freedom. Clearly, Sudan needs these doctors more than Britain, and the British medical system should be run so as to be at least self-sufficient in doctors: Britain has three of the top ten universities in the world. The moral fault does not lie with the Sudanese doctors who migrate. The moral responsibility for the consequent scarcity of doctors in Sudan, and its repercussions in heightened mortality, lies squarely with the source of the temptation.

We introduce the concept of *sustainable migration*. We argue that it has the potential to reset the debate on criteria on which a new consensus can be forged. Our aim in this paper is not to provide a concrete or comprehensive policy blueprint for all areas of migration. That would be unrealistic. It is to offer a definition and unifying framework, from which we can begin to develop more specific policies within and beyond Europe. We want to offer a common language, accessible to politicians from across the political spectrum, policy-makers, and the general public, around which consensus can be built. We begin with ethics because in order to lead public debate, politicians must seize the moral high ground.

Sustainable migration is not merely a technocratic term, focused just on measuring the distribution of costs and benefits. It is inherently political and inherently ethical. For some academics, sustainable migration should be defined as ‘a fair distribution of the costs and benefits of migration’.<sup>4</sup> For us, that does not go far enough. It holds constant the levels of migration and tells us nothing about what a just distribution of costs and benefits looks like. It stops short of normative and political engagement at a time when what we need most is a unifying ethical framework.

---

<sup>4</sup> See, in particular, Erdal, M, Carling, J, Horst, C, and Talleraas, C (2018) ‘Defining Sustainable Migration’, *PRIO Paper*. Oslo: PRIO.

We set forth three criteria for sustainable migration policies. First, migration policies must be acceptable to a large majority of citizens through the normal democratic process. Second, they must be based on a ‘no regrets’ approach: we should have confidence that receiving societies, sending societies, and the migrants themselves will retrospectively regard the policies to have been in their long-term interests. Third, policies must meet basic ethical obligations. In particular, they must be compatible with meeting two core duties of rescue towards outsiders: helping poor societies to develop and ensuring sanctuary is available to refugees, neither of which have to depend upon mass migration. Put simply, a working definition of a sustainable migration policy might be *“migration policy that has the democratic support of the receiving society, leads to ‘no regrets’ outcomes for the receiving society, sending society, and migrants themselves, and fulfils basic ethical obligations”*.<sup>5</sup>

It is feasible, we argue, to devise migration policies that meet these criteria and this paper sets out to define some. We begin primarily from the perspective of Europe and aim to take-up the abandoned middle ground, charting a course between the extremes of the open door and exclusion.

The paper divides into four main parts. First, we explain the changing relationship between democracy and ethical norms on immigration, highlighting the need for a sustainable migration framework. Second, we explain the framework. Third, we explore what it means in different contexts, illustratively taking the examples of Nordic countries and the UK. Fourth, we draw upon the evidence-base within social science to identify and illustrate some specific policies for sustainable migration. Finally, we conclude with a preliminary series of principles for implementation.

## **2 Democracy and Changing Norms**

Today, politicians and policy-makers in Europe lack a clear moral framework for thinking about migration policies. Ethical norms are in flux, and two recent changes have taken place that contribute to this uncertainty. These changes affect both the rich and poor world, and relate to the changing relationship between democracy and immigration.

---

<sup>5</sup> Or, put more universally, ‘has the democratic support of’ might be considered as ‘is compatible with the political system of’ in other political systems.



### ***High Income Countries***

The first is a change in the ethics governing the minority of refugees and migrants who come to high-income countries. Although, most refugees stay in the South, an increasing number are moving along with other groups of migrants to high income countries. The flow into high-income countries from poor ones spans a spectrum from refugees, the economically desperate, people seeking to better their lifestyles, through to young men seeking excitement and liberation from the restraints of social norms back home. Currently, within this spectrum neither citizen nor legal opinion is well attuned to distinguishing between the different forms: they have increasingly come to be defined as a single, amorphous category. Politicians of the far right want to categorise them all as a threat; politicians of the left want to categorize them all as victims; lawyers do what lawyers do: bend the wording of laws to their particular objective as determined by their client, disconnected from both current ethical norms, and the practical consequences of applying decisions at scale.

Given high levels of border control, such journeys from poor countries to rich ones are often extra-legal and so dangerous, relying upon paying smuggling networks. This both selects out the most economically distressed, and frequently results in significant loss of life, as witnessed in Europe's Balkans and Central Mediterranean routes, the Central American corridor, and the Indian Ocean route to Australia. European migration policy is currently in flux, but whatever policy changes are chosen, continued extra-legal migration is highly damaging. It inflicts substantial costs on migrants themselves, while excluding those most in need, all while eroding the trust of citizens in their governments.

The decline of labour-intensive manufacturing and growing structural unemployment in many rich countries have contributed to increasing public fears about globalisation. Underlying voting patterns in Brexit, the election of Trump, support for the Far Right in Europe indicates a stark correlation between the two factors. The areas voting Leave, Trump, Le Pen, or AFD were invariably concentrated in the places where labour-intensive manufacturing jobs had once been concentrated and are no longer. Their flight to China, South-Asia, and now automation, represents the underlying source of structural economic change that has driven fear and alienation. But in the absence of compelling political narratives relating to structural change in the economy, migrants have become the go-to scapegoat for politicians. And the underlying structural trend will only worsen. Automation represents a game changer for migration politics. In their seminal study, Frey and Osborne predicted

that 47% of US jobs will disappear in the next 20 years due to mechanisation.<sup>6</sup> Deloitte estimates that 11m jobs in the UK will be lost to robots by 2036.<sup>7</sup>

In this context, immigration has become increasingly politicised, both by populist nationalist and mainstream politicians. Most notably, the European refugee crisis of 2015-16, and its mismanagement by Europe's political elite contributed to greatly increasing the salience of migration, while undermining public confidence in governments' migration policies. The European 'crisis' was never inherently a crisis of numbers: even 1 million asylum seekers divided across 28 countries might have been manageable. It was a crisis of politics, and a crisis of trust: European politicians were unable to put into place just, rule-based frameworks compatible with citizen preferences. But this did not make it any less of a challenge for Europe.

From the UK's Brexit campaign, to elections in France, Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands, populist nationalists won votes on anti-immigration platforms. Across Europe, the centre-ground is rapidly revising its ethical position on migration, partly to counteract the Far Right. For example, in Austria the far right was frustrated from becoming the largest party in the 2017 election when the centre-right changed its ethics. Similarly, in Denmark in February 2018, the Social Democrats announced a significant rethink of their ethical position. The position is truly in flux. On the centre-right while *de facto* reversing Germany's brief open-door policy, Chancellor Merkel has continued to insist that she 'did the right thing' as dictated by Germany's constitution. Similarly, in February 2018, Martin Schultz, the leader of Germany's Social Democrats insisted that the old ethics of the OECD elite would override the new ethics of citizens, stating that 'Germany must comply with international law, regardless of the mood in the country'.<sup>8</sup> But Chancellor Merkel has suffered an extraordinary loss of political authority, and the decline of Mr Schultz has been yet more dramatic, being forced to announce both that he will step down as party leader, and not become a minister. These rapid political changes reflect a shift: the ethical norms pertinent for immigration from poor countries have shifted from being set by elites to those of their citizens. This trend has not been confined to Europe, as the politics of the United States and Australia highlight. And while opinion polls show that most societies are tolerant towards some immigration, the demand is for a coherent, rule-based system, and public confidence in migration policy urgently needs to be rebuilt.

---

<sup>6</sup> Frey, B and Osborne, M (2013), 'The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerisation', Oxford Martin School,

[https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/The\\_Future\\_of\\_Employment.pdf](https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/The_Future_of_Employment.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Deloitte (2016), 'The Robots Are Coming: Moving Beyond Traditional Methods of Automation', <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/finance/articles/robots-coming-global-business-services.html>

<sup>8</sup> Financial Times (2018), 'Bavarian Leader Under Fire for Inviting Viktor Orban', Jan 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

### ***Low and Middle-Income Countries***

The second is a change in the ethics governing the large majority of refugees in poor haven societies. Despite continuity in migration as a whole, displacement due to conflict and state fragility has reached unprecedented levels. And virtually all of the world's refugees not only *originate* from low and middle-income countries but the overwhelming majority, over 85%, also *remain* in low and middle-income countries. As a result, some of the poorest countries in the world are hosting a disproportionate number of refugees. Indeed, just 10 countries host 60% of the world's refugees, with most being so poor that they are recipients of aid programs unrelated to their role as havens for refugees.<sup>9</sup>

The governments of high-income countries now have far less influence than what they had come to expect, as to how refugees in these poor havens are treated. In the 1960s and 1970s when the majority of host countries were ruled by authoritarian regimes, their governments were accountable to donor governments in the OECD, but not to their own citizens. Now, most of them are procedural democracies: their governments are accountable to their own citizens as electors for any decision to allocate scarce resources to non-citizens. In practical terms, the ethical norms pertinent for the treatment of refugees have shifted from being set by elites who run OECD governments, to those of citizens of poor haven countries. This is central to the future of global refugee policy because many of the poor societies that are havens for refugees are struggling to cope with the significant challenges to economic development and security created by hosting large numbers. When external responsibility-sharing is inadequate, it makes it far easier for governments hosting large numbers of refugees to threaten to close borders or even to expel refugees. In 2016, Kenya, a procedural democracy, threatened to close the Dadaab refugee camps and expel Somali refugees after politicians responded to public concerns relating to security with reactionary rhetoric relating to refugees.

Our goal is to avoid the destabilising politics of panic, whether in high, middle, or low-income countries. We aim to offer an alternative to opportunistic or posturing policy-making, whether by the Left or Right. In its place, we outline a framework for sustainable migration based on a securely

---

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR (2017), *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016* (UNHCR: Geneva), <http://www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34.pdf>

defensible ethics that can help guide and inform governments and elected politicians around the world.

### **3 Sustainable Migration**

Any vision for migration policy must first identify the principles that define ‘good’ migration policies. We therefore begin with ethics. What should the moral purpose of the state be when it comes to migration? To whom does it have obligations, and where there are conflicts and trade-offs, how should these be reconciled?

Politicians across the political spectrum need an ethically-grounded common language through which to articulate ideas to their electorates. We believe that the language of ‘sustainable migration’ can play a unifying role, allowing mainstream politicians, whether from the centre-left or centre-right, to clarify ethical obligations and to frame policy proposals in a coherent and enduring manner.

In general terms, sustainability implies the ability to maintain a desired set of outcomes over time. The concept has become the organising principle of many policy fields, most notably international development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for example, represent recognition that the goal of development is not just rapid economic growth, but the improvement of human welfare in a manner that can be balanced with environmental, economic, social, cultural, and political imperatives over time.

What does it mean in relation to migration? We define sustainable migration policies as *“migration policy that has the democratic support of the receiving society, leads to ‘no regrets’ outcomes for the receiving state, sending society, and the migrant themselves, and fulfils basic ethical obligations”*. To make this more precise, sustainable migration policies should fulfil three criteria. First, they must be compatible with the democratic mandate; second, they must be based on a ‘no regrets’ approach; third, they must fulfil basic ethical obligations. Here we unpack each of these. It is important to note that the object of sustainability here is not migration per se, but rather the *policies* relating to migration.

#### **a) Basic Ethical Obligations**

Politicians need to be clear on what ethical obligations we do and do not have when it comes to migration. Furthermore, at a time when the salience of international law is being challenged, a

language of ethics needs to be reintroduced into public debate. Recourse to legal arguments can sometimes be persuasive at an elite level but it is not a substitute for appeal to people's moral intuitions. A non-technocratic and accessible language is needed to explain to citizens when, why, and under what conditions our societies have duties relating to migration.

States' primary obligations are towards their own citizens: this is the 'social contract' that an election both symbolises and directs. However, states and their citizens also have some obligations towards non-citizens, including distant strangers. Here it is important to distinguish between 'reciprocal obligations' and 'non-reciprocal obligations'. Most of our moral obligations – including those towards economic migrants – emerge from reciprocal obligations. They are based on mutual interest, consent, and may be acquired over time. In contrast, countries have some, albeit limited, non-reciprocal obligations. In addition to treating all people with dignity and in accordance with human rights, two 'duties of rescue' stand out.

The first relates to poverty. We have an obligation to assist in improving the wellbeing of people around the world living in societies that fall into *mass poverty*. The duty is to ensure that these societies become stable, functional, and capable of supporting human flourishing, escaping mass despair. Importantly, these obligations are towards societies rather than individuals. The USA has many poor people, but lifting these poor people out of poverty is not a responsibility of Norway. America is rich enough to do this itself and were Norway to take on this responsibility, it would create extreme moral hazard: rich people in high-income countries would leave it to Norway to assist their poorer fellow-citizens. In contrast, rich societies such as Norway have an obligation to poor societies: they are too poor to lift everyone out of poverty by transfers from their few affluent people.

The second duty of rescue relates to refugees. We have obligations to assist and protect people who flee dysfunctional societies that are simply unable to ensure the most basic minimum standards of human dignity, especially those societies that become dangerous. People who flee danger should be supported to return to normality as quickly as possible through meeting basic needs, restoring autonomy, and eventually, providing a route home or integration elsewhere.

These duties apply to all states with the capacity to meet them. They are both individual obligations and a shared obligation, jointly held by the community of functioning states. All states should contribute to meeting these obligations. But they are likely to be more effective in fulfilling them if

they work collectively and establish international institutions to enable such commitments to be met effectively.

Duties of rescue are obligations that do not depend upon reciprocity: they are basic human responses to need. There is no such unreciprocated duty towards migrants *per se*: there is no human right to live anywhere on Earth that you might want. On the contrary, a sense of belonging to place is one of the most fundamental human emotions, and so the society that already has that sense of belonging to the place that it occupies, has the right to determine the number and rights of non-citizens to whom it grants entry. However, whatever immigration policies are chosen should be compatible with meeting both of the duties of rescue. Consequently, they should not reduce the capacity of societies characterised by mass poverty to catch up with global living standards. Hence, it would be unethical for a high-income society to further raise its own living standards by reducing the pool of human capital in a poor society. Importing talented people from such societies can only be justified if doing so produces an unequivocal benefit to the poor society. Similarly, they should be compatible with the duty of rescue towards refugees: migration policies can only be just if reconciled effectively with the long-term interests of the majority of refugees who choose to wait in haven countries neighbouring their home, many of whom aspire to repatriate post-conflict.

#### ***b) Democratic Mandate***

Political legitimacy is central to sustainability. A democratic mandate requires that a given set of policies can maintain the required political support from governments and their citizens over time: the policies should not be such as to create cumulative resentments that lead to their reversal: such as happened so spectacularly with Chancellor Merkel's choice of policies in September 2015. Hence, to meet duties of rescue towards refugees and societies in mass poverty sustainably, depends upon policies being chosen in such a way as to meet these duties, while maintaining the support of median voters, in both the global North and the haven countries of the South. Devising the combinations of specific public policies that satisfy this dual constraint is the essence of good public policy formulation in this domain.

Of course, what is politically sustainable is not based on a fixed constraint. Politics is changeable and some of these changes can neither be shaped by public policy choices nor even anticipated. But, for example, a persistent trend of mounting resentment, such as has characterised past migration policies in many countries, is clear evidence of unsustainability. That said, there is some scope for public policy to change attitudes over time. For example, public policy has gradually nudged popular

attitudes towards homosexuality and smoking to shift over time; the former becoming more acceptable and the latter less acceptable.

Any sustainable approach can and should balance both pragmatism and vision. It must be sufficiently realistic to adapt to political constraints. But it must also have the vision to try to progressively change people's beliefs about migration.

What is 'sustainable' depends in part on context. Where values and narratives trend towards cosmopolitanism there will be greater scope for more expansive immigration policies. But even traditionally liberal societies tend to have 'rooted cosmopolitan' traditions, with commitments to outsiders being grounded in a strong sense of belonging. The fine balance of political leadership is to float new ideas that are well-based in evidence, while ensuring that what is actually done has a democratic mandate. A democratic mandate achieved through fake news and exaggerated fears delegitimizes the very concept of such a mandate.

Sustainability is also relative to the particular juncture of history. Today, there are structural trends, which are particularly politically challenging for a policy of sustainable migration and are likely to endure. First, the shift to multi-polarity at the global level. Throughout the history of the refugee regime, the US has played the role of a 'hegemon', offering leadership and underwriting a significant proportion of UNHCR's budget and global resettlement numbers. It has led key *ad hoc* responses to major refugee crises. With the rise of multi-polarity and the redistribution of power, this period is now over: one state will no longer maintain its unquestioning commitment to provide over a quarter of the regime's funding and resettlement places. Second, global economic change. While many Western societies continue to have ageing populations and demographic needs, the collapse of labour-intensive manufacturing, the rise of automation, and prospect of mass technological redundancy of workers who lack sophisticated skills, have contributed to an increasingly anxious and intolerant political climate in Europe.

### **c) 'No Regrets'**

Beyond fulfilling the core duties of rescue, migration policies should be a matter of mutually beneficial self-interest - *enlightened* self-interest. This applies both to receiving states deciding to grant permission for entry, and to those who take the decision to migrate. Put simply, the condition of sustainability implies 'no regrets': choices made at time period 1 should be the same choices that

societies and migrants would have taken again given the benefit of hindsight looking back from time period 2.

In high-income receiving states, surveys tend to show that a majority of citizens think that there has been too much immigration. In effect, citizens regret the past decisions of the elites who had set migration policy. Hence, there is a gap between elite expectations at time period 1 and actual outcomes as perceived by ordinary citizens at time period 2. Elite responses have predominantly been that the perceptions of ordinary citizens are mistaken; whereas the responses of ordinary citizens have been to suspect that elites are dismissive of non-elite interests. The clash between these two incompatible narratives has polarized societies, and the dismissal of citizen concerns by elites further eroded public trust in national immigration policies. As distrust of politicians has deepened, societies are reaching a tipping point: switching to the politics of panic, an example being the admission of the Swedish prime minister that 'we were naïve'. This in turn has increasingly led to an over-correction of the original chosen course, as politicians have closed the borders beyond that which would be in the society's enlightened self-interest, in order to create a credible signal that they have changed their priorities.

For migrants themselves, a similar logic applies. For many, choices are informed and based on significant amounts of information. However, for some, long and dangerous journeys may be based on a mismatch between expected outcomes and actual outcomes. Many are unable to secure the exaggerated economic or educational opportunities which they had imagined were available. Narratives of regret occur frequently, but return is infeasible because the returning migrant would face the humiliation of admitting failure to friends back home. Migration policies must aspire to support informed migration decision-making and not tempt people into decisions they may later regret.

Indeed, a disproportionately high number of irregular migrants crossing the Mediterranean are young men. This may partly reflect aspiration and partly lower degrees of risk aversion related to embarking on often dangerous journeys with uncertain outcomes. Yet when those journeys take place based on imperfect information, and outside the social and cultural control mechanisms or stewardship structures that exist in communities of origin, they may lead to unsustainable outcomes for migrants and receiving societies. Some states, like Canada, have purposefully limited their intake of unaccompanied male youths. While this is probably motivated by citizen fears of the risks of violence associated with unaccompanied male youths, it may also have been ethically sound from the perspective of the enlightened self-interest of those to whom the policy denied entry.



The relationship between this principle and sustainability is that, a ‘no regrets’ approach closes the gap between the point at which choices are made and the outcomes that arise, again helping to avert the consequences that lead to a politics of panic. In systems analysis, a related idea is that decisions should be ‘ergodic’ – i.e. they should enable the system to map back onto itself, rather than be destabilised by a mismatch between expectations and outcomes.

Putting into practice a ‘no regrets’ approach is obviously challenging because all areas of life are based on uncertainty and risk. The key is to ensure that state policies are evidence-based and draw upon the best understanding approaches for predicting societal outcomes. It also represents an appeal to politicians from across the spectrum to base policies on time horizons that extend beyond the electoral cycle. With respect to would-be migrants, it relies upon creating an enabling environment for informed and reversible decision-making, including the creation and dissemination of information, legal pathways, and viable options for return.

***Operationalising the Framework***

These three criteria form the basis of our sustainable migration framework and are summarised in table 1.

<b>Ethical Criteria</b>	<b>Specific Conditions</b>	<b>Obligations Towards</b>
<b>1. Duties of Rescue</b>	Development	Poor and fragile societies
	Protecting and empowering refugees	Individual refugees
<b>2. Democratic Mandate</b>	Compatible with citizen preferences	Citizens and values
<b>3. No Regrets</b>	Long-term interests of the receiving societies, sending societies, and migrants	Our future selves

*Table 1: Three Ethical Conditions for Sustainable Migration Policies*

Having established ethical criteria and a common language for sustainable migration, our next task is to explore the possible functioning and implementation of the framework. Beyond a unifying language, how might it, concretely, guide political choice and policy-making? Our criteria-based approach relies upon being able to operationalise each of the three core elements.

Democratic mandate requires that we ascertain and disaggregate citizen preferences relating to migration. This is something that is done regularly in public policy, and can be done with recourse to opinion polls, voting patterns, or survey evidence. However, there are particular challenges relating to establishing which aspects of citizen preferences are fixed and which ones are malleable and can be influenced by political leadership. Social scientific experiments relating to particular framing or compensation scenarios might help reveal the extent to which opinions and narratives can be changed through public deliberation or political leadership.

Establishing a precise ‘no regrets’ threshold is also challenging but the key elements involve having regard for the consequences of economic migration decision-making for the long-term development trajectories of countries of origin; enhancing the information available to would-be migrants; and basing receiving society immigration policies on long-term economic, demographic, and social forecasting. Again, an evidence-based approach to migration policy can support a sustainability agenda. Across the board, it requires that receiving societies adopt a precautionary principle to ensure that current choices do not lead to unforeseen future outcomes.

Fulfilling our core duties of rescue requires that policy-makers ask whether our immigration policies are compatible with these non-reciprocal obligations. Are we undermining the development prospects of the poorest societies by depriving them of their most talented workers and citizens? Are we meeting our obligations towards refugees? However, it also requires that policy-makers consider whether they are meeting these obligations in the most efficient and effective ways. To what extent can our duties towards the poorest societies and refugees be met without recourse to mass migration?

#### **4 Understanding Sustainability in Context**

Our ethical framework is intended to be universally applicable within the contemporary world. But for each of our sustainability criteria, in different types of society there will be different influences that shape societal acceptance of immigration. Historically, societies have reached tipping points at which public support for immigration has waned. Occasionally, this has led to backlash and a need for policy recalibration. Notable historical examples of such ‘tipping point’ moments include the end

of open immigration to the United States between 1921 and 1924, beginning with the Emergency Quota Act; the UK between 1962 and 1971 beginning with the Commonwealth Immigration Act; and Germany's suspension of the *Gastarbeiter* scheme for Turkish workers in 1973.

The determinants of thresholds, tipping points, and backlash will vary. A 'tipping point' can be understood to be reached when the political, social, and economic context cannot sustain the *marginal growth* of immigration (and also emigration when our focus is poor country of origin). Marginal growth here can be understood in relation to the number and composition of migration.<sup>10</sup> A marginal growth in quantity may – depending on context - lead to a sudden qualitative jump in political response. For example, an immigrant group may develop into a parallel society when the critical mass of persons making up the group is big enough to sustain the inner cultural logic of that group. This group or society may also become a pull factor in itself – a 'workhorse' for accelerating immigration. The particular ways in which marginal growth relates to tipping points, though, is inextricable from context, and will also be shaped by political leadership.

A range of typologies already exist for categorising types of immigration states based on the society's socio-economic model. To take three examples, the *welfare-solidarist* model (e.g. Nordic); *liberal* (e.g. UK), and *libertarian* (e.g. US) models are likely to vary in terms of what sustainability means. Broadly speaking, the major political focus of sustainability is different in each, with greater emphasis on 'tipping point' impacts on the welfare state and social integration (Nordic), jobs (the UK), and security (the US) respectively. Here we discuss three illustrative models, exploring how their different histories and cultures shape the thresholds of sustainability in Nordic states, the UK, and the Gulf States. Our purpose is not to be empirically comprehensive but simply to demonstrate that cultural and political context shapes sustainability.

---

<sup>10</sup> See Collier, P (2013), *Exodus: How Migration is Changing Our World* (London: Penguin).

### ***Welfare-Solidarist (e.g. Nordic)***

At the turn of the millennium, all of the Nordic states had social democratic governments.<sup>11</sup>

Collectively, they had among the most generous policies towards refugees and the most progressive social integration policies towards migrants anywhere in the world. Over a fifteen-year period, all have elected parties of the Right or Centre-Right, and only Sweden currently has a Social Democratic government. Concern with immigration has become one of the most salient political issues for voters. Centre-right coalitions, centre-left coalitions, conservatives, and social democrats alike have been divided within their own ranks. But across the region, a significant aspect of the domestic backlash against open door immigration has come from concern to preserve the welfare states, and traditional Nordic communitarian values.

To take the example of Denmark, amid rising concern with immigration, the 2001 election was the first time since 1924 that the Social Democrats did not win the most seats. Since then, the rise of the Danish People's Party (DPP) has been inexorable. Immigration rates have doubled from around 30,000 per year to around 60,000 per year, and the immigration stock has more than doubled bringing total migrant numbers to 500,000 – around 8% of the population.<sup>12</sup> One of the strongest arguments put forward has been the argument that immigration is a threat to the welfare state and social security.

A Danish Ministry of Finance report in 2014 suggested that non-Western immigrants in Denmark cost the taxpayer USD 50bn per year compared to a USD 84bn contribution from Danish nationals. In other words, 59% of the taxes collected from nationals are allocated to non-Western immigrants. This partly reflects a significant unemployment gap between Danes and non-Western immigrants.<sup>13</sup> The undermining of public confidence in the welfare state has been further exacerbated by DPP arguments about the impact on crime, with data suggesting non-Western immigrant men being 144% more likely to be convicted of a crime than Danish men, with an increasing proportion of this crime associated with geographically separated ghettos within specific urban areas of Copenhagen.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Although Norway briefly elected a centre-right non-socialist coalition government from 2001 to 2005.

<sup>12</sup> For a good overview of Denmark's changing immigration policy, see: The Atlantic (2016), 'How Not to Welcome Refugees', <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/01/denmark-refugees-immigration-law/431520/>

<sup>13</sup> Danish Ministry of Finance (2017), 'Indvandreres nettobidrag til de offentlige finanser',

<sup>14</sup> The Local (Danish news in English), 'Crimes by Immigrants in Denmark Have Doubled', <https://www.thelocal.dk/20161013/crimes-committed-by-foreigners-in-denmark-have-doubled-in-six-years>

The DPP's immigration policies have been harsh, and included legislative amendments in 2016, which included the seizure of assets from asylum seekers and significant reductions in benefits to refugees. However, they have also been popular. The Social Democrats have begun to adapt their immigration policies in response, gradually seeking more sustainable approaches. The key policy challenge has been to reconcile preservation of the welfare state with the challenges of globalisation. The leader of the Social Democrats, Mette Fredericksen, for instance, recently argued that refugee and migration policies must be compatible with preserving public confidence in the welfare state model.

With shades of variation, Denmark's dilemma has affected the wider region: the Right has taken the initiative on immigration, mobilising arguments relating to the welfare state, and gradually the demand for greater sustainability has taken hold across the entire political spectrum.<sup>15</sup>

But the Nordic context also indicates that certain policies are more likely to be acceptable than others. The immigration challenges are not just about circulation; but about integration as well. The concern is to ensure that if people come, they are willing and able to fully participate constructively in the economic, social, and cultural life of the country. Migration is therefore not merely an economic transaction; it has to be at levels that make full assimilation viable.

Sustainable migration in Nordic countries might therefore have a number of context-specific characteristics, when contrasted with other regions. These might, among others, include considering the following questions. To be sustainable do policies need to: 1) be 'low numbers and high rights'; 2) retain public confidence in the welfare state; 3) involve permanent social integration for most of those that do come; 4) offer significant support for refugees, but mainly close to home? These are all illustrative characterisations, which could be debated in detail but serve to show how sustainability means something specific in context.

### ***Liberal (e.g. the UK)***

In the UK, public concerns and the sources of 'backlash' have been differently weighted. Of course, concerns about the impact on health, education, and public services are present. But there is a far greater focus on jobs. The dominant Nordic arguments – relating to the welfare state and social

---

<sup>15</sup> For analysis of the importance of the welfare state in immigration debates in Scandinavia see the work of Grete Brochmann. E.g. Brochmann, G et al (2011), *Immigration and the Scandinavian Welfare State, 1945-2010* (Palgrave MacMillan: London).

integration – are much less frequently mobilised. The main sources of backlash relate more directly to issues connected to ‘the future of work’.

On the one hand, the UK, for instance, faces significant post-Brexit skills shortages, such as a shortfall of an estimated 50,000 lorry drivers. Sectors such as construction, hospitality and catering, and domestic work rely upon over 10% EU immigration.<sup>16</sup> Population pyramids also show the reshaping of advanced industrial societies towards ageing population; Britain has a significantly ageing population. Reflecting this, unemployment in the UK is at a 40-year low level. Unsurprisingly, there is a vocal business lobby campaigning for workers, especially from abroad.

And yet there is almost unprecedented anxiety relating to migration. People are aware of the need for low-skilled workers and yet they fear downward pressure on wages and threats to their quality of life. Despite only 1.5 million being unemployed, a much higher proportion are in situations of economic precarity, being on ‘zero hours’ contracts, in part-time work, or short-term employment. Opinion polls reveal that the greatest levels of public anxiety about immigration are not geographically located within the areas within the highest levels of immigration (London and the South-East), they are often located in the areas with the highest unemployment rates and, more specifically, in the areas that used to have high concentrations of labour-intensive manufacturing. Reflecting this, an Ipsos Mori opinion poll from 2017 reveals that 52% of the British public support high-skilled immigration but only 18% support low-skilled immigration.

The UK therefore faces a different sustainability dilemma compared to Scandinavia: how to reconcile business’ need for labour with public concerns about increasing economic precarity. Comparatively, sustainable migration in the UK might therefore have a number of context-specific characteristics, in contrast to other societies: 1) it can support short-term and circular migration to cover cyclical labour and demographic shortages; 2) it needs to create complementary job opportunities for nationals to retain support; 3) it needs to be complemented with social and industrial policies that support regions facing structural economic decline; 4) the 0.7% of GDP allocation to international development and its historical bilateral relationships offer an opportunity to build global migration partnerships. These illustrative factors highlight the UK’s comparatively greater emphasis on the

---

<sup>16</sup> CIPD (2017), ‘Facing the Future: Tackling Post-Brexit Labour and Skills Shortages’, (CIPD: London), [https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/facing-the-future\\_2017-tackling-post-Brexit-labour-and-skills-shortages\\_tcm18-24417.pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/facing-the-future_2017-tackling-post-Brexit-labour-and-skills-shortages_tcm18-24417.pdf)

socio-economic distribution of costs and benefits of migration as significantly underlying the democratic legitimacy of migration policy.

### ***Hierarchical (e.g. Gulf States)***

If Nordic societies are based on a logic of equality (*homo equalis*), Gulf states are based on a logic of inequality (*homo hierarchus*). While the Nordic model's emphasis on high taxes, significant social security and benefits, and cultural integration shapes the meaning of sustainable migration policy, Gulf states' 'bottom lines' relating to migration could not be more different. In the Nordic countries, migrants need to be integrated into all aspects of socio-economic life in order for migration to be sustainable. In the Gulf states, high numbers of migrant workers can be sustained but within a framework that explicitly prohibits permanent assimilation, is temporary, and curtails access to benefits.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and the UAE) member states all have guest-worker schemes that sustain their economies. In the UAE and Qatar just over 10% of the resident populations are citizens; the overwhelming majority are temporary migrant workers. They come as part of the so-called *Kafala* (sponsorship) system, mainly from South Asian states. The scheme ties workers to their specific employer. They often cannot change jobs within the country, there is virtually no pathway to citizenship, and migration is temporary.

Aspects of the approach, including labour market conditions and employers sometimes seizing passports have been heavily criticised by human rights groups, leading to some reforms in some of the Gulf States. However, the low rights, high numbers model, has been shown to have considerable development benefits from countries of origin, migrant families, and the Gulf States.

For our purposes, what is interesting is that the model tells us about the contextual nature of sustainability. The primary concern of the Gulf States is demography. The Gulf States are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim countries with monarchical regimes. Their regimes fear the potential for political and economic instability created by permanent integration. It is for this reason that they have generally declined to admit Syrian refugees onto their territory but instead contributed generously to funding humanitarian assistance in other nearby host countries.

The Gulf states' sustainability dilemma is therefore: how to maintain high numbers but with low rights and no pathway to integration. In contrast to other societies: 1) it will not support permanent

integration; 2) it can offer large-scale temporary migration; 3) it will not host refugees, although it will give significant humanitarian aid; 4) it will not offer significant levels of rights or welfare protection to migrant workers. As with the other two cases, these points are merely intended to be illustrative, and can be debated, but they highlight that sustainability means different things in different contexts, depending on a range of political, cultural, and economic factors.

Below, we turn to explore examples of policies that might fulfil our sustainability criteria within a European context, relating to the broad categories of economic migration and refugees.

## **5 Policies for Economic Migration**

Migration is obviously diverse. People move across borders for many reasons: aspiration, survival, family unity, employment, lifestyle. Many people have 'mixed' motives. And people often move in mixed groups comprising people with different backgrounds and motives. The reasons why people are forced to flee across borders are also no longer limited simply to 'persecution'. State fragility, food insecurity, and environmental change are increasingly important drivers of forced displacement. The complexity of migration, and the limitations of institutional categories for capturing that diversity can be duly acknowledged.

Nevertheless, from a policy perspective, maintaining a clear distinction between 'refugees' and 'economic migrants' is ethically sound and politically essential. There is a stark difference in the moral obligations that rich societies have towards refugees compared to all other migrants. One group is fleeing out of necessity, and have no option but to cross a border in order to access rights. The other group has a choice and is fleeing in order to achieve a better standard of living. Of course, one can debate where the line should be drawn: people who face starvation or violence in a fragile state – 'survival migrants' arguably have as much right to flee across a border as people fleeing persecution and might also be regarded as 'refugees'. But, contrary to the view of some academics,<sup>17</sup> the distinction between those in need of international protection and those not in need of international protection is fundamental and should be maintained as part of a sustainable migration framework.

---

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Crawley, H and Skleparis, D (2018), 'Refugees, migrants, neither, both: categorical fetishism and the politics of bounding in Europe's 'migration crisis', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(1): 44-64.



Our starting point is therefore that there is no right to migrate *per se*. Economic migration, unlike refuge, is primarily transactional. It is based on reciprocal rather than non-reciprocal obligations. It should therefore be mainly based on a logic of reciprocity. In order to be reciprocally beneficial, it must be 1) good for receiving states and societies; 2) good for migrants and 3) good for sending societies. The requirement that it be good for sending societies is based on the idea that economic migration must be compatible with our duty of rescue to poor societies around the world, in other words, we have to take seriously the implications of brain drain and the extent to which it may be out-weighed by other benefits such as remittances.

Sustainability also requires control and enforcement of migration rules. But enforcing migration rules must be made compatible with human rights. States should seek practical ways to ensure the most humane implementation of immigration management. Wherever possible, they should also look to find alternative options for irregular migrants, based on informed consent, and collaboration with other governments for whom admitting the same migrants may well be compatible with a sustainable migration policy.

To highlight the intuitions behind this, let us take the example of Norway. Modern Norway could arguably be considered one of the most successful societies in the modern world. Success can be measured by various metrics, but the two that currently look to be best-founded are average per capita income and average wellbeing.<sup>18</sup> Norway is the top-ranked society in the world on both of these measures.

Consequently, because Norway provides ordinary people with a high standard of living, many people from less successful societies would like to settle in it so that they could enhance their own living standards. In this section, we turn to three perspectives that need to be considered: migrants, receiving societies, and sending societies.

### ***The Perspective of Migrants***

Migrants gain unambiguously from leaving their home country and settling in Norway. Using per capita income as a simple metric, a migrant who eventually gets average income in Norway gets

---

<sup>18</sup> Per capita income is clearly inadequate because it omits both how income is distributed, and other aspects of life that matter to people, but its advantage is that it is precise and well-measured. Wellbeing is now recognized as more reliable than 'happiness', and has the advantage of capturing the things that ordinary people regard as important for a satisfying life.

around \$80,000. If he has left Southern Italy, where typical incomes are below \$20,000, he will have achieved an annual gain of \$60,000. If he has left Nigeria, where typical incomes are around \$1,000, he will have gained even more.

Given the size of these gains, the puzzle to be explained is not why many people migrate, but why the scale of the migration is not very much larger. This is because of five barriers:

Climate, language, culture, knowledge and laws.

The difference between the climate of Southern Italy and Norway may well be such as to discourage migration, but many other countries have climates that are in some respect unattractive: too hot, too dry, or too wet. Exchanging them for the Norwegian climate is unlikely to be a decisive deterrent.

Language is a major barrier to initial migration, but as a diaspora builds up, it becomes less important. There is universal instinct for homology: most people prefer to interact with people like themselves. Hence, immigrants naturally tend to cluster together, and so the language-of-origin can persist as the language of the clustered community. Hence, there is less need for new immigrants to learn Norwegian. Public policy can offset this process: for example, in Singapore, government imposed dispersion in public housing; and the Netherlands required immigrants to pass a language test within a set period of arrival.

Culture is a further important barrier: people seldom wish to abandon their own culture. As with language, the barrier is diminished as the diaspora grows and people can cluster into culture-preserving groups. In the absence of active public policy to prevent it, the society becomes multi-cultural, with both benefits and costs.

Knowledge is also initially a major barrier: people do not tend to immigrate to a society about which they know nothing. Evidence from social psychology shows that most people rely predominantly on their social networks for knowledge, so again a diaspora is critical for transforming the knowledge base of potential migrants. As it grows, knowledge ceases to be a barrier.

This leaves laws, and their enforcement, as increasingly the key barrier to migration. The self-interest of migrants is to come to Norway. There is neither a 'natural right' nor an international law, granting economic migrants the right of abode in the country of their choice: this is a matter for national law. Norwegian law can only be determined by the ethics and interests of Norwegian citizens. The ethics of migration only arises if there is a potential conflict between the interests of Norwegian citizens and those of migrants: if both Norwegians and migrants gain, Norwegians will want as many migrants

as possible, and this will rapidly become a very large number indeed. The approximately four million native Norwegians will rapidly become a minority of the Norwegian population. So, the first question is whether there is likely to be any tension between the interests of Norwegian citizens and the interests of immigrants. We now turn to this question.

### ***Effects on Receiving Country Citizens***

We focus upon the economic effects. The economic effects are partly on flows of income and partly on stocks of assets. The impact of past immigration on European labour markets has been carefully studied and the best estimate is that its overall medium-term impact has been zero, within a very small margin of error.

Turning from income to assets the position is different. Due to past efforts discussed below, Norway has accumulated the largest stock of public assets per capita in the world. Some of these assets are physical, such as infrastructure; some are institutional, such as the tax administration; and some are financial, notably the elimination of public debt and the accumulation of a Sovereign Wealth Fund currently worth around \$200,000 per citizen. A few of these assets can be shared with new arrivals without reducing their value to existing users: for example, if an immigrant watches the television it does not reduce the ability of citizens to watch television. But such public assets are exceptional. Mostly, new users reduce the access of existing users. The most evident instance of this dilution is the Sovereign Wealth Fund. For a family of five to settle in Norway would saddle fund with \$1m of new entitlements. These could only be met by reducing the entitlements of current citizens by \$1m. But since Norway also has the world's largest stock of physical assets per capita, this underestimates the cost to Norwegians of sharing assets with economic migrants.

An indirect economic effect is via social norms. Norway's current success is the result of a sustained collective effort by its citizens to pay a substantial share of their individual incomes as tax revenues, and of the nation's leaders to use these revenues for public investment instead of public consumption. This depends upon two distinct layers of trust: citizens need to trust other citizens to pay tax; and citizens need to trust the government to use it well. Historically and globally, this is an unusual achievement. We know relatively little about the effect of immigration upon trust. Inevitably, most economic migrants are coming to Norway from societies characterised by much lower levels of both inter-personal trust and trust in government. Whether they bring such attitudes with them, or switch to Norwegian values, is an important question for research. What is somewhat better researched, is that in response to immigration, citizens themselves seem to be less willing to

pay tax.<sup>19</sup> While far from decisive, it is a reasonable matter of concern whether a major change in the composition of the population would weaken the unique resolve of most Norwegians to sacrifice current individual consumption for future collective gains.

Bringing these three distinct effects together, the effect on social norms is uncertain. However, given the fortunate situation of Norway, the effect of any major change in social composition is arguably less likely to be favourable than unfavourable. Since these stock transfer effects are large and negative, and the flow effects from wages are essentially zero, it seems unlikely that the overall economic effect of migration on Norwegian citizens is significantly positive and more likely that it risks being significantly negative.

This does not necessarily imply that Norwegian law should be used to limit immigration. All societies benefit culturally from a degree of diversity, and all want their citizens to have some scope to migrate to other societies (for example, many Norwegians retire in Southern Europe), and this implies reciprocity. But to the extent that economic considerations matter, it suggests a potential tension between the interests of Norwegians and those of economic migrants. Hence, we turn to the ethics of balancing these interests.

### ***Effects on Poor Societies***

Clearly, economic migrants from societies that are reasonably prosperous, albeit far less so than Norway, have no ethical claim on Norwegians. For example, incomes in Britain are now less than half those of Norway, but the divergence is in part because, while North Sea oil was split equally between the two countries, Norwegians used it for public investment whereas the British did not. If Norwegian law permits my family to relocate I am grateful for this generous act, but cannot see the basis for claiming it as an ethical right. Hence, the pertinent ethical issue concerns only those societies that are very poor. We will take Sudan as an example of such a country. Should the Sudanese have the right to move to Norway? We distinguish between the skilled and the unskilled.

---

<sup>19</sup> The strongest evidence for this is subsequent to the publication of *Exodus*, and is from Rueda (2017) and Munoz and Pardos-Pardi (2017).

### *Skilled migration*

We know from patterns of migration that the people most inclined to migrate from poor countries are the skilled. They gain most in terms of earnings, and high-income countries are more inclined to allow them to do so than the unskilled.

There are more Sudanese doctors in Britain than in Sudan. Yet this is not a triumph of mobility and freedom, but rather a moral disgrace. Clearly, Sudan needs its doctors more than Britain, and the British medical system should be run so as to be at least self-sufficient in doctors: Britain has three of the top ten universities in the world. The moral fault does not lie with the Sudanese doctors who migrate: we are currently teaching one of them who, rather heroically, is planning to return home. His friends think he is foolish and they are probably right: nothing that Sudan can offer him can come close to matching the lifestyle of a doctor working in Britain. Sudanese doctors offered employment in Britain have been tempted beyond reasonable moral endurance. The moral responsibility for the consequent scarcity of doctors in Sudan, and its repercussions in heightened mortality, lies squarely with the source of the temptation.

This is an extreme instance of a more general phenomenon: poor countries can only develop if they are able to retain their scarce skilled people. Narrowly conceived, skilled workers are vital for unskilled workers to become more productive; more broadly conceived, well-educated and forward-looking people are vital to guide a society towards progress. This is not to say that capable people should not migrate from poor societies, but that the decision to enable them to do so should be taken *with a view not to their own self-interest, but to that of their society*. The gross income inequalities between the richest and the poorest countries impose a moral obligation on the governments of rich countries to prioritise policies that are conducive to that objective.

The policy that unambiguously helps poor societies is to enable their smart young people (equally balanced by gender) to come and study, deepening their skills, perhaps also gaining a short period of work experience, but requiring them to return to their country of origin upon completion of this defined period. As long as this is known in advance, and rigorously enforced without exceptions, expectations are set accordingly, and a newly skilled young person will willingly return to his/her society where he/she will be highly valuable.

Norway faces the temptation to cherry-pick the few highly skilled people from poor societies analogous to what Britain has done with Sudanese doctors. If this policy saved more on training than

it cost through the dilution of public assets per capita, it would be in Norway's economic interest as well as the interest of the skilled migrants themselves. But the policy would evidently be at the expense of those left behind in poor countries. Should the Norwegian Government wish to conduct such an unethical policy on high-skill immigration, it would be appropriate to offset it by substantial training programs in those countries, monitoring the outcome to ensure that the net impact is favourable.<sup>20</sup>

### *Unskilled migration*

For a different reason, temporary migration is the most useful model for the unskilled. The example here is the Gulf States who already run such programs on a large scale. Elements of some of the programmes have been rightly criticised on human rights ground. But temporary migration serves two valuable functions. One is as a safety net: if the migrant's family situation deteriorates at home for whatever reason, a member can be dispatched to the Gulf to earn an income that provides a cushion. The other is that because the duration of stay is known to be temporary, from the perspective of the migrant, it is evident that the connection with his/her home society should be maintained, saving income to use upon his/her return, while from the perspective of the society, the job that he has occupied will become available to others upon the termination of his contract, so that opportunities across the society are increased.

Policy on unskilled migration is subject to a different temptation: that of the 'headless heart'. The migrants who come to the country to settle are far more visible than the people left behind in the poor societies-of-origin, and so make far more news in the media. The immigration-for-settlement of the unskilled indeed transforms the lives of this visible but tiny minority of the people who were part of the global poor, providing citizens with a 'feel good' effect of moral superiority. We might think of this as the 'Swedish option'. Objectively, however, the policy is considerably inferior to that of temporary migration. Temporary migration creates far more opportunities and spreads the windfall gains to migrants more evenly over a larger group of winners, instead of privileging a tiny group of lottery winners. In Sweden, resistance to unskilled immigration-for-settlement has now set in, so that even the past modest annual rate of inflow has become politically unsustainable. Thus, the future

---

<sup>20</sup> As Oded Stark has shown, it is theoretically possible for the recruitment of skilled people from a poor country to induce more people to get education ('brain gain'). But where the rate of graduation of skilled people is supply-constrained, and the rate of outmigration is high, as likely in the poorest countries, this unlikely to offset the direct drain of skilled people. *Exodus* discusses the recent evidence that in the poorest countries brain drain predominates over brain gain.

annual flow of new opportunities will be very limited. This contrasts with a policy of temporary immigration, in which a pool of jobs is rotated among those wishing to migrate. For example, public policy might be set so as to maintain a constant share of immigrants in the national population, and a fixed term of residence in Norway, enforced without exceptions as in the Gulf. To make the point concrete, Norway currently has 16% of its population of immigrant origin and projects this to rise to 30% by 2030. Hence, over the next 12 years, assuming that the Norwegian population continues to accept this rate of increase, opportunities for immigration will not exceed around 1% of the population. Had Norway instead adopted a Gulf-style strategy of temporary, four-year contracts, a 16% stock of immigrants would generate an annual flow of new opportunities for migration of 4%. The flow of opportunities for poor migrants would have been four times greater than present projections, and because citizens would not be anxious about a rising proportion of immigrant settlers, this much higher flow of opportunities would encounter less political resistance.

### ***Policies for Economic Migration***

In order to meet the sustainability requirements outlined above, innovative policies are needed, which both draw upon and contribute to a stronger evidence base on sustainable migration. Here, we outline some illustrative examples.

#### *Aspirational migration*

A significant proportion of movement from poor to rich countries is 'aspirational migration'. It involves people embarking on dangerous journeys based on a desire to improve their lives, and sometimes those of their families and communities. The people crossing the Mediterranean are a diverse group. Some may be refugees who were unable to find protection in a neighbouring safe haven country, some are refugees who chose to migrate from a safe haven country, and a tiny minority may even have become refugees as a result of their treatment en route. However, the majority today are probably not fleeing violence or persecution. They are leaving Sub-Saharan African states because of a belief that their best prospects for a better life come from travelling to Europe. And yet their only viable route is likely to be to embark on dangerous journeys, use smuggling networks, and enter Europe's asylum systems. Those coming on boats are disproportionately young, male, and educated. Their hope and sense of purpose is driven by an idealised vision of Europe.

A long-held fiction has been that development assistance can stop this kind of migration. Yet we know that modest increases in income alone actually increase people's likelihood of emigrating since they are better able to finance it. What is needed is more profound: it is to restore pride and purpose: young Africans need to believe that Africa itself will provide a future of promise, (just as young Chinese now look confidently to their future). As part of this psychological transformation, Europe's approach to Africa must switch from financing *entitlements to consume* towards bringing opportunities that *empower people to produce*. This is about helping African governments to create a sense of shared belonging based on common purpose. It must entail support for a credible economic strategy to encourage business and the jobs that only business can create. Europe has the firms that Africa desperately needs. Put simply, Europe's ethical strategy should be to bring jobs by the million to Africa, rather than to tempt Africans by the thousands to Europe.

But further research is also needed on what works. One of the most established and robust empirical relationships in migration studies is that between migration and development. The so-called 'migration hump' suggests that in the short-term, increased development actually increases the demand for emigration. However, research has too rarely disaggregated 'migration' or 'development' in order to adopt a more nuanced view of how particular aspects of 'development' might influence particular types of 'migration'. Indeed, it seems plausible that a successful development strategy could reduce some demand for aspirational migration if it focused not just on GDP/capita but also on meaning, belonging, and narrative, for example.

### *Circular migration and matching*

Carefully designed temporary migration policies have the potential to be compatible with both duties of rescue and sustainability. In a recent study called Shared Harvest, economist Michael Clemens and Hannah Postel examined the experience of seasonal agricultural migration as part of a pilot program designed as a form of post-disaster development assistance to Haiti.<sup>21</sup> In 2014, in the context of post-earthquake Haiti, a program was created by IOM using such visa to match Haitian farmworkers with US farms where US workers were unavailable.

In contrast to traditional circular migration programmes, the pilot specifically matched new seasonal agricultural jobs in the US with the profile of surplus agricultural labour in Haiti. Clemens and Postel

---

<sup>21</sup> Clemens, M and Postel, H (2017), 'Shared Harvest: Temporary Work Visas as US-Haiti Development Cooperation',



found that the effects of targeted matching differed from more traditional forms of assistance to Haiti, in three ways: “The economic benefits are shared roughly equally between Haiti and the United States; these benefits are very large, including raising the value of Haitian workers’ labor by a multiple of fifteen; and the portion of the benefits accruing to Haiti is uncommonly well-targeted for the direct benefit of poor Haitian households.” In each month, the Haitian workers brought \$4000 to the US economy and £3000 to the Haitian economy.

For our purposes, what is interesting about this pilot is that it shows that circular migration can be conceived in ways that are compatible with both of our ethical conditions – rescue and sustainability. In terms of the former, the scheme outperformed traditional aid to a developing society, without permanently depriving them of their citizens. In other words, it strikes the balance of benefits in terms of remittances with avoiding long-term brain drain. In terms of the latter, it was politically accepted by the main participating states, Oregon and Alabama, and led to an economic contribution.

#### *Brain drain, brain gain, and brain circulation*

High-skilled emigration from developing countries has increased over time; it is around 15% for low-income countries. In some states such as Haiti, Guyana, and Jamaica, the average emigration rate is 40 percent for tertiary educated people born in these countries. While this movement may benefit receiving countries with skills-shortages, and lead to remittance sending, knowledge diffusion, and opportunities for trade, it can also have consequences for brain drain, depriving these societies of their most qualified and able citizens.<sup>22</sup> Docquier and Machado, for instance, suggest that liberalising skilled migration to Europe would lead to an increase in human capital in the EU countries of up to 10% and 6% in the US; however, this would be at a cost to developing countries, which would experience a drop in GDP of up to 2.5%.<sup>23</sup>

But a further complication for high-skilled migration is that while there are economic benefits to the receiving state, there is often still political anxiety. Opinion poll data in Europe shows that “culture trumps skills”.<sup>24</sup> Polls by Ipsos Mori suggest that around half of British society supports high-skilled immigration. But it also reveals significant nuance, with the public more supportive of such

---

<sup>22</sup> Barro and Lee (2013).

<sup>23</sup> Docquier and Machado (2015).

<sup>24</sup> <https://policyexchange.org.uk/why-culture-trumps-skills-public-opinion-on-immigration/>

movement from Australia and New Zealand than the rest of the world, and more supportive when such movement involved joining family already in the UK. The challenge of skilled migration is therefore different from low-skilled migration. It is about seeking ways to balance economic gains to receiving societies with a) obligations to sending societies and b) political sustainability in the receiving society.

While some states like the UK and Australia resort to points-based systems to manage high-skilled immigration, there may be more targeted policy interventions that can strike the right balance. Diaspora engagement policies may help ensure an ongoing commitment by migrants to the society of origin. Receiving states such as Ireland and sending states including New Zealand and the Philippines have invested in institutions to promote these ongoing relationships. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that where such loyalties are nurtured, the majority of skilled migrants ultimately go home, and do so with an enhanced ability to contribute.<sup>25</sup>

## **6 Policies for Refugees**

Refugees need to be seen as a distinctive category of migrants, to whom we have a duty of rescue. It can be argued that the legal definition of a refugee needs to be updated to reflect the reality of displacement in the Twenty-First Century. Indeed, today fragile states drive displacement far more than the classic 'persecution' of the Cold War. But regardless, people fleeing danger, and who have left home in order to survive, are distinctive from other migrants.

Our response to refuge should be driven by a different logic compared to economic or aspirational migration. On the one hand, refuge should be motivated by a logic of compassion. It stems simply from our common humanity, and the need to help fellow human beings in serious need, whether proximate or distant. On the other hand, migration should generally be driven by a logic of reciprocity. It should be something undertaken insofar as it is mutually beneficial and is compatible with our sustainability criteria.

The purpose of refuge is to provide people fleeing danger with access to a safe haven and to restore their lives to normality as quickly as possible. The purpose of refuge is not to provide an alternative

---

<sup>25</sup> Kone and Ozden 2017

migratory pathway. Onward migration only becomes necessary insofar as refugee needs remain unmet in the main safe haven countries close to home.

A functioning refugee system needs to be able to provide three things to refugees. First, rescue. After people flee danger, they need to be provided with food, clothing, shelter, and their basic needs. This by itself, however, is not enough. Second, autonomy. One of the areas that has been systematically neglected is to empower refugees to regain the ability to be self-sufficient; to help themselves and their families. While some will have vulnerabilities, many also have capacities, which can be built upon. Jobs and education are the key to regaining self-determination. They also enable refugees to move beyond long-term dependence on aid. Third, a route out of limbo. Too often, refugees end up trapped in camps or settlements for decades. The ideal should be to enable people to return home but where this is not possible, an alternative such as resettlement to a third country becomes necessary.

The challenge for states is to find ways to ensure that all refugees receive access to all of these things, consistently and in the most efficient and collectively sustainable way. At the moment, a small minority – usually disproportionately young men -- end up selecting to move onwards, while the majority are left in camps or cities with little assistance and few prospects. This status quo is inefficient, inequitable, and unjust. Effective institutional design is needed to ensure that the core functions of the refugee system can be fulfilled more sustainably. For most, this will be in the neighbouring countries close to home; although there will be principled exceptions to this. Below, we outline evidence-based ways to achieve sustainability.

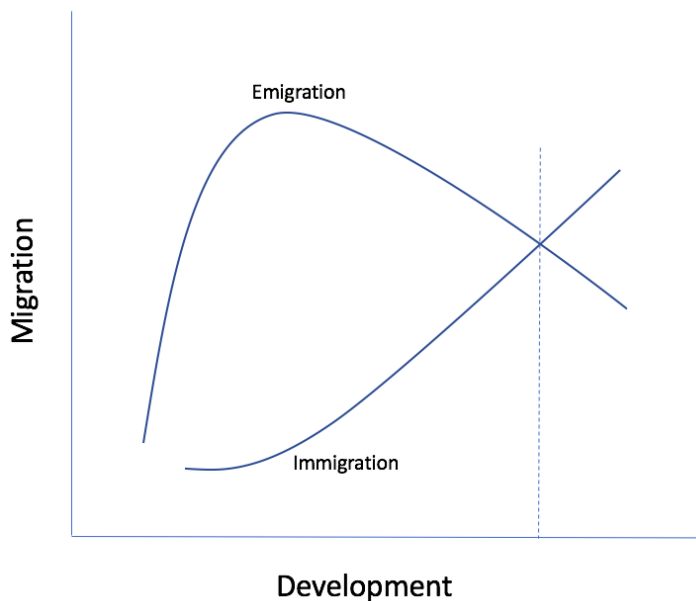
### ***Development-Based Approaches***

One of our working hypotheses has been that if we were to create better employment and education opportunities for refugees in first countries of asylum, this would not only benefit refugees and host communities, but it would also potentially reduce onward secondary movement, thereby contributing to greater sustainability.<sup>26</sup> However, some have argued that, on the contrary, increasing development opportunities for refugees is simply likely to increase secondary movement. This critique is based on recourse to the so-called ‘migration hump’ theory, regarded as one of the most empirically robust relationships within migration theory. The ‘migration hump’ posits that the relationship between migration and development is more complex than simply a ‘more development

---

<sup>26</sup> Betts, A and Collier, P (2017), *Refuge: Transforming a Broken Refugee System* (Penguin: London).

leads to less migration' correlation. Instead it suggests, on the contrary, that in the short term, at least, increased development, leads to an increased demand and ability to emigrate.



*Figure 1: 'Migration Hump' Relationship Between Migration and Development*

However, while we accept that this relationship holds for migration in general, we question its application to refugees. The 'migration hump' remains to be fully disaggregated for different types of migration, and there are several grounds for believing that increased development for refugees will reduce the demand for secondary movement.

First, on a conceptual level, refugees are, by definition, a proportion of the population that chose *not* to be migrants prior to the outbreak of the crisis. They did not choose to leave their homes; their homes have become unsafe. From this one might infer that refugees are less likely to increase their demand to emigrate simply because of improved development outcomes.

Second, the Syria crisis offers some evidence that it is the absence rather than the presence of adequate opportunity in neighbouring countries that led to onward movement. Few Syrians moved to Europe until after October 2014, three years into the crisis. This period coincided with changes in the refugee policies of all three major host countries in the region. In that same month, faced with growing ISIS violence, Jordan began to close its borders to new arrivals, Lebanon adopted its 'October Policy' imposing a series of restrictions onto refugees. Turkey effectively closed its border

crossings.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, humanitarian assistance levels, including food aid was cut in all three countries, leaving Syrians even more dependent on low-paid informal sector employment in countries that all had severe restrictions on the right to work.

Third, one of the most relevant datasets on mixed migration was collected in 2017 by Ground Truth Solutions, which surveyed more than 4,000 refugees and migrants in Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, and Austria.<sup>28</sup> They found that most refugees felt relatively safe and relatively welcome in the first countries of asylum. But in all countries what they reported that they lacked were mainly socio-economic entitlements and opportunities. The findings relating to Turkey are perhaps most relevant for considering the causes of onward movement to Europe. Data was mainly recorded in Istanbul, Izmir, and Gaziantep. The most consistent sources of reported unmet needs across the three cities related to job opportunities, insufficient income, and poor housing. In other words, the survey concludes, “earning a living is the key to empowerment”.<sup>29</sup>

None of the evidence offers a definitive understanding of the relationship between development and the secondary movement of refugees. But it does offer grounds to question the relevance of the ‘migration hump’ relationship to refugee decision-making. It implies that, insofar as there is a correlation, increased socio-economic empowerment will not only enhance the sustainability of protection for refugees and host communities but may also reduce the demand (and need) for onward movement.

### ***Refugee Assistance in the South***

If most refugees are in low and middle-income countries, that is where the focus of refugee assistance should be. But to be sustainable, the support provided cannot be based just on indefinite

---

<sup>27</sup> Betts, A et al (2017), ‘The Local Politics of the Syrian Refugee Crisis: Exploring Responses in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan’ (RSC: Oxford).

<sup>28</sup> Van Praag, N (2018), ‘Should I Stay or Should I Go?’, Ground Truth Solutions, <http://groundtruthsolutions.org/2018/01/30/should-i-stay-or-should-i-go/>

<sup>29</sup> The findings relating to Turkey are perhaps most relevant for considering the causes of onward movement to Europe. Data was mainly recorded in Istanbul, Izmir, and Gaziantep. The most consistent sources of reported unmet needs across the three cities related to job opportunities, insufficient income, and poor housing. In other words, the survey concludes, “earning a living is the key to empowerment”. In Istanbul, when refugees were asked about their biggest three challenges they reported: employment/finance 75%, accommodation 57%, documentation 36%, language 31%, resuming education 16%. In Izmir, they reported: language 40%, employment 34%, rent 29%, working conditions 15%, social integration 13%. In Gaziantep: employment 32%, language 30%, finance 25%, documentation 22%, and accommodation 22%.

humanitarian aid. Of course, providing food, clothing and shelter are crucial during the emergency phase, and continue to be important for the most vulnerable. But the fiction of ‘temporariness’ does not apply to most refugee situations in the South. The average length of exile is over a decade, and for those in exile for more than 5 years, the average is closer to two decades. We need to reimagine refugee assistance based on supporting refugees’ autonomy through greater economic inclusion in host states. Done well, this will benefit refugees and host communities, and better equip refugees with the skills and sources of resilience needed to either rebuild their countries of origin or be integrated elsewhere. We discuss three innovative approaches to offer more sustainable alternatives to long-term humanitarian aid in camps: the Ugandan Self-Reliance Strategy, the Jordan Compact, and Kenya’s natural experiment of piloting a ‘self-reliance model’ in the new Kalobeyei settlement alongside a traditional ‘aid model’. Some of these examples are being supported through UNHCR’s Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).

#### *Example 1: Uganda’s Self-Reliance Strategy*

Uganda hosts over 1.4 million refugees, making it the largest host country in Africa. Its refugees come from a wide variety of unsettled neighbouring countries, including South Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. Furthermore, given the volatile region in which it sits, it has an almost unbroken history of hosting refugees ever since the late 1950s when Rwandan Tutsis first fled revolution and genocide, and arrived at the still-existing Nakivale settlement.

Yet in contrast to its refugee-hosting neighbours like Kenya and Ethiopia, Uganda has taken a radically different approach to refugees. Shunning encampment, it has allowed refugees the right to work and a significant degree of freedom of movement. In rural open settlements, it gives refugees plots of land to cultivate for both subsistence and commercial agriculture, and allows market activity. In cities, it allows refugees to start businesses and seek employment. The context creates a fascinating environment in which we can therefore begin to understand what is possible when refugees are given basic socio-economic freedoms. Oxford University undertook a survey of around 2000 refugees of different nationalities across urban (Kampala), established settlement (Nakivale), and emergency contexts (Rwamwanja). It showed how both refugees and Ugandan nationals benefit from refugees being given the right to work.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Betts, A et al (2016), *Refugee Economies: Forced Displacement and Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

### *Example 2: The Jordan Compact*

Most refugee hosting countries are not like Uganda, as they do not allow refugees the right to work or other socio-economic freedoms. Jordan was one such country. It hosts 660,000 Syrian refugees and until 2016 effectively denied them the right to work.

At a London Pledging Summit in February 2016, the UK government played a leading role in concluding a deal called the Jordan Compact to support Syrian refugees.<sup>31</sup> Its focus is to enable refugees, previously subject to regulatory barriers to labour markets, access to jobs. The deal entails a model designed to help Jordan make the leap to manufacturing by integrating a focus on refugees into its pre-existing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) strategy. By allowing refugees to work in the SEZs, Jordan hopes to attract the additional support needed to make its own national development strategy work. Two innovations aim to assist this. First, the EU has offered tariff free access to European markets on condition that businesses in Jordan employ a certain proportion of Syrian refugees and produce in one of 18 SEZs and in one of 52 product categories. Second, the World Bank has for the first time offered a Concessionary Finance Initiative, providing low-interest loans for middle-income countries hosting refugees.

Around 85,000 work permits (albeit only 3000 women) have been issued at the reduced fee. The challenge has been attracting multinational corporations (MNCs). Classic Fashion Apparel operates on the Al Hassan Industrial Estate in Irbid, employing Syrian refugees since the Compact, selling to the likes of Wal-Mart and Asda. IKEA is placing orders from factories within the SEZs. But these examples remain rare. The challenge has been how to attract international investment or get MNCs to place orders with the factories at sufficient levels to scale the SEZ model.

Nevertheless, the Jordan Compact represents a pioneering pilot that draws upon a combination of trade and development policies to leverage employment and economic inclusion for refugees in a host country that previously denied refugees the right to work. The model has since been picked up by Ethiopia and Malaysia.

---

<sup>31</sup> Betts, A and Collier, P (2017).

### *Example 3: Kenya's 'Natural Experiment'*

Kenya hosts nearly 500,000 refugees, mainly from Somalia and South Sudan. In contrast to Uganda, it operates an 'encampment policy', formally insisting that refugees not be allowed to work. In practice, though, there is a lot of variation in the implementation of that policy, and many refugees do work, either in the informal economy or for international organisations.

With European Union funding, Kenya recently embarked on a pioneering experiment. In the context of the mass influx from South Sudan, it distributed South Sudanese refugees into two different assistance models, which might be called an 'aid model' and a 'self-reliance model', within 50km of one another. The former group were sent to the Kakuma Camp and the latter group to the new Kalobeyei settlement, created in June 2015 with the intention to facilitate integrated self-reliance for refugees and the host community within Turkana County. This offered a unique opportunity for researchers from Oxford University to follow both populations in order to assess the pros and cons of each type of model for the same population within the same geographical context. Our sample included 1,106 South Sudanese recent arrivals living in Kakuma camp, and 927 South Sudanese recent arrivals living in the Kalobeyei settlement.<sup>32</sup>

We found that, at an early stage, neither model is necessarily 'better' in overall terms but each one has advantages and disadvantages, implying the need to create the right package of support and autonomy for newly arriving refugees. While this is only one case study – and is at a very early phase following the South Sudanese influx -- it appears to show that 'self-reliance' is better for income, food security, and consumption. However, 'aid' may be better for asset accumulation, participation in sports, and community activities. The challenge within a sustainable refugee policy framework is therefore to be able to integrate the economically significant aspects of both aid and self-reliance.

### ***Refugee Integration in the North***

If refugee assistance is undertaken sustainably in safe haven countries close to crisis countries, secondary movement should remain relatively low. But there will nevertheless be a need for Northern states to preserve spontaneous arrival asylum as a last resort and to support resettlement. But this, of course, entails identifying sustainable ways to integrate in advanced economies.

---

<sup>32</sup> For an overview of the study, see Betts, A (2018), 'Self-Reliance in Kalobeyei: Socio-Economic Outcomes for Refugees in North-West Kenya' [www.refugee-economies.org](http://www.refugee-economies.org)



One of the most important elements of integration is employment. Germany, for instance, reported early 90% unemployment among Syrian refugees a year after their arrival. A study of economic outcomes for Syrian refugees in Austria, the Netherlands, and the UK highlights why refugee integration has been so challenging.<sup>33</sup> Albeit based on a relatively small sample of 305 refugees, the study suggests that the economic lives of Syrian refugees in Europe are characterised by a paradox: many are highly educated (38% have a university education), and yet unemployment is very high (82%) and of those who are unemployed, nearly all rely mainly on state benefits. Meanwhile, entrepreneurship and self-employment do not fill this gap. Despite 32% of all refugees surveyed having owned their own business or worked in a family business in Syria, only 1.5% of interviewees had started their own business since arriving in Europe. Meanwhile, the informal economy appears to offer very little alternative income source for refugees.

In many ways, this degree of unemployment should not be surprising. Even Syrians, among the most highly educated groups of refugees, have previously been producing in a \$2,000 GDP/capita economy, and in moving to Europe, they are required to be competitive within \$40,000 GDP/capital economies. The productivity gap is simply too large to close without significant investment in retraining. This is one of the reasons why in previous studies on refugees' economic integration in advanced economies,<sup>34</sup> the positive economic contributions sometimes take a generation to materialise. However, our own work reveals three other significant barriers to Syrian refugees' employment in Europe: language; institutional disincentives to work, and skills recognition. Although the private sector has filled some of this gap, based on a range of refugee-specific training schemes of the type pioneered by Ben and Jerry's or H&M, the numbers of refugees involved have been relatively small, and corporations' motives have generally been based more on CSR than a sustainable business case.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Rethinking Asylum Policies***

Once we meet our responsibilities to the majority of refugees in the countries of safe haven, asylum in Europe becomes a relatively minor matter, but policy-makers still need to address it. The flows may be 'mixed' by population and motive, but a rule-based system must retain a clear distinction

---

<sup>33</sup> Betts, A et al (2017), 'Talent Displaced: The Economic Lives of Syrian Refugees in Europe', (Deloitte: London).

<sup>34</sup> Hugo, G (2008).

<sup>35</sup> Tent Foundation (2018), Presentation at Business Refugee Action Network Meeting, London, January 2018, Virgin Money, London.

between refugees and aspirational migrants. Precisely because Europe is such a tempting destination for poor people, a sustainable European asylum policy will also need to distinguish between refugees who have already found a safe haven closer to home, and those who absolutely need to move further afield in order to be safe. Refugees have an entitlement to live in safety and dignity; they do not have an entitlement to unlimited migration. Implementing these two distinctions – refugees versus aspirational migrants, and refugees who have yet to find safe haven and those who have already found it – is operationally challenging but essential.

### *How Should Asylum Decisions be Made?*

The way in which countries distinguish refugees from migrants must be consistent across time and space. It is crucial that outcomes are predictable and uniform to avoid perverse incentives for asylum seeking to gravitate to whichever country currently sets the least demanding criteria. Inconsistencies and unpredictability undermine public trust in asylum, lead to ‘asylum shopping’ by opportunistic migrants and smugglers, and contribute to unjust and arbitrary outcomes for refugees.

Asylum decision-making within Europe should therefore be subject to three core criteria.

First, *geographic consistency* has been a core aim of the Common European Asylum, but it has not been achieved. It has also missed a more fundamental aspect of geographic consistency: the need for consistent decision-making whether an application for asylum is made from *within* Europe *or outside* Europe. The determination of whether someone is a refugee must yield (as-close-as-possible) identical outcomes whether the claim is made in a country-of-origin, a regional safe haven, a transit country, or in the European Union. And once determined, it should be lodged within a shared biometric database. Whether someone has managed to put a foot on a European beach should be irrelevant to whether they can get access to protection. Second, it should be *fast-tracked*. At the moment, decision-making is slow, bureaucratic and cumbersome. We need a process that is sufficiently simple so it can be decentralized to each of the many places from where a claim could be made. There will be contexts in which appeals need to be made but investing in effective and efficient asylum systems will help establish consistency and legitimacy. Third, it should ensure that people *cannot disappear* while awaiting outcomes. The way to achieve this is not through detention but through entitlements and law: access to resources, employment, and movement should be used to shape incentives to remain accessible. Here digital technology should also allow people to be easily tracked and traced without recourse to detention.

### *Where Should Asylum Decisions be Made?*

Decision-making should be available within Europe. But it makes sense for the bulk of asylum procedures to be undertaken outside Europe. This way we can reduce the need for people to embark on dangerous and unnecessary journeys. Europe's unrivalled network of consulates and embassies should be empowered to operate under European jurisdiction in both haven countries and countries of origin.

Other than as a transition measure, such facilities should not be located in the countries of transit, such as Libya (or should only be available to Libyan nationals). Libya is not a haven country, and people should not be induced to go there. Similarly, 'transit processing centres' in whatever form are merely part of the transitional phase: moving from the current chaotic situation to sustainable policies. Even as transitional policies, some variants such as the Australian model of closed offshore detention centres, have already been rejected as undesirable, inhumane, and likely to be unworkable. In contrast, empowering consulates to process asylum claims is not exposed to such criticisms. The key is that the same decisions and outcomes should exist between asylum claims lodged within or outside Europe.

### *Who Should be Responsible for Asylum Claims and Where Should Successful Claimants Settle?*

The Dublin system is manifestly inequitable and so cannot be part of a sustainable migration policy. A sustainable system requires a clear separation between responsibility for 'assessing a claim', which can be lodged with whichever embassy or consulate an asylum seeker chooses to use (or within the first European territory in which a person arrives), and the responsibility for 'settlement and integration'. Those judged to be refugees should be distributed across EU member states based on mutually agreed criteria. Quite evidently, European countries have different histories, different demographics, and different degrees of diversity. The new technologies of optimal preference matching can be used to link the preferred destinations of those refugees who meet the eligibility requirements for asylum in Europe, to the preferences of states and communities willing to welcome them. This approach can contribute to sustainability because of its greater respect for citizen and refugee preferences, while also leading to a fair distribution of what should be small numbers of refugees.

Once a match has been made, it should not be capable of being subverted by subsequent refugee movement to their ideal location. The Schengen arrangement was intended to confer reciprocal rights of frictionless movement on European citizens, not on refugees or temporary migrants. Enforcement need not require border checks as long as behind-the-border controls on access to employment, benefits, and public services are effective.

### **Rethinking Resettlement**

Resettlement is an area of refugee policy that too often escapes scrutiny. It is often viewed as inherently benevolent and serves as a means for distant countries and progressive members of civil society to believe that they are 'making a difference'. And yet, relative to its historical and cultural primacy in major resettlement countries such as the United States (US), Canada and Australia, resettlement's purpose and outcomes often evade debate or examination.

Many of the more recent European resettlement policies emerged as knee-jerk responses to the European refugee 'crisis'. For example, the UK's Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme was extended to 20,000 Syrians for one reason only: the day after the body of the Syrian refugee child Alan Kurdi was depicted on the front page of every British newspaper, resettlement had become the answer.

The purpose of resettlement is specified with surprising vagueness. It is supposedly a protection tool, a durable solution, a means to strategically leverage other durable solutions, and a form of burden sharing and international solidarity. Yet the impact of resettlement is almost never measured relative to any of these putative purposes. Because aims and objectives are often so imprecisely specified, there are no benchmarks or metrics to hold governments accountable for their resettlement practices or to measure what resettlement actually achieves. It is no wonder that it is so challenging for politicians to justify to electorates.

Yet resettlement is consistently only available to the few: it is offered to fewer than 2% of the world's refugees. It is often not what refugees want: in late 2015 UNHCR approached around 100,000 Syrian refugees about possible resettlement to Canada and 70% said they were not interested. It leads to inequitable allocation of resources: we spend around US\$135 on every refugee in the West for every US\$1 we spend on a refugee in developing regions of the world.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Betts and Collier (2017).

So why do Western states persevere with resettlement? Why is it the default means by which a country like the US supports refugees? There are many reasons. Some are cultural and historical, with some countries and regions having long-standing commitments to resettlement. But there is also an underlying political economy. The ‘resettlement industry’ is worth billions of dollars a year to the NGOs and civil society organisations that participate in it. In the US, there is a significant amount of lobbying – much of it faith-based – in state capitals and in Washington DC to advocate for resettlement places, including for specific groups. Resettlement feels good and it feels cathartic.

None of this is an argument not to engage in resettlement. Resettlement represents a potentially important part of the toolbox for protecting and assisting refugees. It is also a good way to reassure electorates that the most ‘deserving’ refugees are being selected and assisted in a manner compatible with managed migration. It potentially fulfils all of the functions that UNHCR associates it with. But to be useful and sustainable resettlement needs to be reimagined.

Most obviously, to be sustainable, good resettlement policies require international collaboration if they are to be effective. Most countries’ resettlement contributions are a drop in the ocean by themselves; collectively they have a greater chance of making a difference. Yet resettlement is not coordinated well enough at the international level. Beyond UNHCR’s Annual Tripartite Consultations, most states make their resettlement commitments to UNHCR on a bilateral basis and fail to coordinate their resettlement policies. This means that the aggregate of contributions from resettlement fails to exceed the sum of its parts.

To be effective, resettlement cannot be conceived as a discrete element of the overall refugee regime but needs to be an integral component part of a wider strategic vision. It has to be a part of comprehensive responses to specific refugee situations around the world, considered alongside responses within host states in the developing world and within the country of origin. But until now, no such overarching strategy has existed, and resettlement conversations have been more about the politics of the resettlement country than about coherent responses to specific refugee situations.

One particularly innovative way to make resettlement work more sustainably for both refugees and receiving states is ‘preference matching’. Matching is an idea developed by the Nobel-prize winning economist, Alvin Roth. It offers a way in which two parties to a transaction can express their preferences regarding outcomes, and then have them ‘matched’ so that they are better off than they otherwise would be. Matching can be defined as “an allocation of resources where both parties to

the transaction need to agree to the match in order for it to take place". It has more commonly been applied to areas such as school choice, kidney exchange, and hospital residency.

Recently, academics Will Jones and Alex Teytelboym explored how matching markets might be applied to refugees.<sup>37</sup> They argued that matching potentially offers a way in which refugees can be consulted about their preferred resettlement destinations, resettlement countries can be consulted on the types of refugees they wish to receive, and refugees and states can be matched. At an international level, the scheme would work as follows to match refugee families across states. First, quotas would be determined for the overall number of refugees each country is prepared to resettle under the scheme. Second, a decision would be made about what criteria would be permitted as valid for state or refugee priorities. This would be an ethical and political choice that would need to bear in mind the consequences for third parties. For example, the sort of educational, gender and income-related selectivity that has inadvertently happened as a result of the Syrian exodus to Germany would be unlikely to meet ethical standards. Third, the scheme elicits the priorities and capacities of both countries (or their sub-regions) and the preferences of refugees. Finally, a centralized process is needed to undertake the match (this might be at a UN-level, a regional level, or a national level, for instance).<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, such a scheme can also be compatible with the private sponsorship of resettlement, adopted successfully by Canada over four decades. The scheme enables communities to support particular refugees and their families to come to Canada and be funded and supported by the community. A range of other countries such as the UK and Germany are now considering adopting similar schemes. The model not only has the potential to increase resettlement numbers but does so in a way that is consistent with citizen preferences. It has also been argued to help enhance narratives of public solidarity towards refugees.

---

<sup>37</sup> Jones, W and Teytelboym (2017), 'The Local Refugee Match: Aligning Refugees' Preferences with the Capacities and Priorities of Localities', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Available Online.

<sup>38</sup> Researchers at Stanford University have quantified the possible efficiency gains from adopting such a scheme. Using a machine learning algorithm to analyse historical data relating to 30,000 refugees resettled to the United States and Switzerland between 2011 and 2016, they found that refugees' eventual economic self-sufficiency depended on a combination of their individual characteristics, such as education level and knowledge of English, and where they were resettled within the country. As one might expect, refugees with particular skills and backgrounds fared better in certain locations than others. Based on this data, the algorithm predicted employment probability in optimal locations for the group of refugees who arrived at the end of 2016 and compared those predictions with how these refugees actually fared in their new homes. The study concluded that if the algorithm had selected locations for refugees' resettlement, the average employment rate among those refugees would have been 41% higher than it actually was.

## 7 Conclusion: Principles for Sustainable Migration

We have provided a working definition of sustainable migration as “*migration that has the democratic support of the receiving society, meets the long-term interests of the receiving state, sending society, and migrant themselves, and fulfils basic ethical obligations*”. It is a definition that we think can avoid the worst perils of political backlash against migration, while preserving many of its benefits. Implementing our sustainable migration framework, though, will require significant political leadership, both nationally and globally. Here we offer ten basic principles that may help guide that endeavour:

1. *Consider what sustainability means in context.* Each society will have different social, cultural, and economic tipping points relating to migration. The thresholds that lead to political ‘backlash’ will differ according to how migration is socio-culturally perceived. In Nordic states those tipping points relate primarily to the welfare state; in liberal states like the UK they relate more to jobs and the future of work. It is for policy-makers to consider on a country-by-country base exactly what the foreseeable sources of backlash may be and to develop sustainability policies that take into account these differences. Specific modes of migration – circular migration, permanent assimilation, resettlement, or asylum, for instance – will have different types of cultural and political resonance among different electorates.
2. *Distinguish the refugee and migration systems.* They have different logics and serve different purposes. Of course, refugees cross international borders, but their primary needs are safety and a return to normality; not migration *per se*. And while the ‘refugee’ definition may well need updating, and many migrants are vulnerable, the two issues should be governed by different logics. For the most part, refuge is a matter of compassion. It requires that we assist distant strangers in needs by virtue of our common humanity. On the other hand, migration is primarily a matter of reciprocity. It stems from the fact that facilitating movement can, and often is, mutually beneficial for migrants, hosts, and both sending and receiving states.
3. *Recognise the underlying purpose of refuge.* During the ‘European refugee crisis’ the underlying purpose of refuge was frequently lost. An effective system is not about enabling unlimited migratory choice. It should be about fulfilling three main functions. First, it must fulfil a duty of rescue. In other words, when people flee danger or face persecution, they must be able to access safety, and have basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter met.

But this by itself is not enough. Second, it must also ensure autonomy. In order to enable refugees to live dignified lives, contribute to host communities, and be equipped to ultimately return home, they need to be able to access jobs and education. This is a role that the refugee system has historically neglected. Thirdly, a route out of limbo. While it may be acceptable for refugees to wait in limbo for a period of time, they must eventually be able to either move home, or be permanently integrated elsewhere.

4. *Undertake responsibility-sharing for refugees based on comparative advantage.* Providing refuge is a collective responsibility, and all states should contribute. However, not all states can or should contribute in identical ways. Some states will be better placed to contribute in particular ways; they may be able to make a greater and more politically sustainable contribution if they are allowed to specialise. Expecting Japan to admit 200,000 refugees onto its territory would not work, but equally unrealistic would be expecting Kenya to donate a billion dollars to UNHCR. All states should do a little of everything – sharing money and people – but we must also recognise that different states face different political trade-offs, and a degree of specialisation and implicit exchange may lead to a greater and more sustainable level of provision.
5. *Engage with politics.* Sustainability is about politics. It relies upon recognising what the political constraints, opportunities, and tipping points are likely to be within local, national, and international politics. Few issues are more politicised today than refugees and migration. And yet, the core international institutions working on refugees generally have ‘non-political’ mandates, and do not actively recruit staff with professional backgrounds in key skill areas like political analysis and diplomacy. In order to achieve sustainability, refugee and migration politics must engage with trade-offs and identify areas of mutual gain.
6. *Improve the evidence-base.* Sustainable policies must be based on effectiveness not dogma. In some cases, appealing to international law may be effective in influencing states; in other cases, it will not be. There needs to be not only ongoing analysis of political constraints and opportunities, but an evidence base on what practices and mechanisms of influence are likely to lead to what outcomes. What are particular state’s ‘carrying capacities’, and how elastic are they likely to be? Which gatekeepers and veto players matter in particular states? What are the tipping points and sources of potential backlash? Under what conditions are refugees more likely to be seen as a burden or a benefit? Rather than lurch towards history or habit, the criterion for policy choice should simply be: what works to fulfil the functions of



refuge and to make migration mutually beneficial over time? To achieve this, all programmes should be both evidence-based and evidence-generating.

7. *Consider labour migration as transactional but respectful.* There is no right to migrate per se. Unlike, refugee, economic migration is primarily transactional. It should be mainly based on a logic of reciprocity and should benefit receiving states and societies, migrants, and sending societies. This requires that migration policy be based on reflection on its sustainability for all three groups. There may, of course, be exceptions to this, such as family reunification, in which there is an overriding ethical imperative, and so discretion and judgement will be needed. Beyond this, sustainable migration will inevitably rely on a degree of control, but this does not mean it cannot be respectful of everyone's common humanity, irrespective of migration status. All migration policies should respect human rights, and governments should seek to identify best practices that make migration management compatible with humane treatment.
8. *Design circular migration to be mutually beneficial.* Temporary migration can have enormous reciprocal benefits. This is especially the case when it is based on careful matching between sending and receiving society needs, not just at national levels but also the local level. Such schemes can be mutually beneficial and contribute to the long-term development of sending societies. However, they will also have more obvious cultural resonance in societies in which migration has historically been understood as transactional rather than as inherently related to social integration.
9. *Manage the trade-offs involved in high-skilled migration.* High-skilled movement from poor to rich countries is economically beneficial to receiving states as well as migrants. But it is not always perceived as politically or culturally beneficial. And it may sometimes harm the sending societies in the global South. It is not a question of closing the door or necessarily adopting a crude quota. But it is important to find ways to manage movement in a way that takes into account or addresses sources of political and cultural concern, and also ensures that sending societies share in the benefits of movement.
10. *Redistribute the benefits of migration.* Migration can offer significant benefits. But these benefits are not always equally distributed, and often the costs of migration fall on those that are already socio-economically marginalised. Across Europe much anti-immigration sentiment is driven by people who are most affected by structural economic changes related

to the decline of labour-intensive manufacturing and the rise of automation. And yet business needs migrant workers. The best way to reconcile this is to ensure that our social policies and industrial policies mean that receiving communities share in the benefits of immigration.

Migration is part of the current globalised world, and it can offer significant benefits to receiving and sending societies, as well as migrants themselves. However, in order to avoid the politics of panic seen in Europe and beyond since 2015, there is an urgent need for clear-sighted and ethically grounded framework for sustainable migration.