



The New European Consensus on Development: A Bold Statement on Migration with Room for Improvement

In many ways, the New Consensus is a welcome clarification to these shifting dynamics between migration, development, and instability. While the new Consensus makes a bold statement to challenge many false assumptions concerning these issues, it unfortunately falls just short of proposing the solutions needed to harness the positive benefits of migration.

By Brandon Locke
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At next month's European Development Days, the EU will formally adopt its new Consensus on Development¹, more than 11 years after the signing of the current version.² The Consensus, which is negotiated jointly between the European Commission, Parliament, and Council, serves as the EU's overarching aid strategy and joint vision for development policy, setting forth a coherent approach to global trends such as climate change, migration, and extreme poverty.

The timing of the new Consensus could not be more appropriate. For years, the EU's development instruments have been in turmoil, with new policies shifting funds annually to

¹ European Council. "The Council adopts a new European Consensus on Development." 2017. Available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/05/19-european-consensus-on-development/>

² European Union. Consensus on Development. 2006. Available at : <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ%3AC%3A2006%3A046%3A0001%3A0019%3AEN%3APDF>

address the refugee crisis and temporarily mitigate the inflows of arrivals to European shores. Controversial new initiatives such as the Migration Partnership Framework³ and the EU-Turkey Deal⁴ have not only politicized a volatile debate over migration management, but also led to shortsighted judgements to reprioritize development funding on efforts that would tackle the “root causes” of migration, instead of poverty eradication. Projects financed by the new African Trust Funds, for example, attempt to create conditions for sustainable growth in countries of origin and assist governments manage migratory flows through stronger border security.

Clarifying the Development-Migration Nexus:

Development experts have long contested the wisdom of such an approach, as data generally shows positive correlations between higher levels of development and migration⁵. Development aid in the poorest countries, such as Niger or Mali, enables citizens to make a “migration investment” towards a middle-income country where they would find higher wages, more opportunities, and a better life.⁶ Potential migrants will only stay put when the margin between the return on their investment in leaving and the opportunities available in their home or transit countries becomes slight. Therefore, increasing development in middle-income countries can decrease migration from those countries, but aid to the poorest will have the opposite effect.

There is no doubt that the so-called “root-causes” of migration are sometimes linked to economic opportunities, but evidence shows that drivers also stem from state fragility, weak governance, and risk of conflict. Governance aid has been shown to be an effective means of decreasing migration from countries of origin; rates decrease when push factors such as political instability are mitigated.⁷ On the other hand, using development funds to securitize borders and further strengthen oppressive regimes could increase irregular flows, especially from countries such as Sudan or Eritrea.

In many ways, the New Consensus is a welcome clarification to these shifting dynamics between migration, development, and instability. It recommits the main priority of development aid to the eradication of poverty, while also recognizing the need to promote human security and democratic governance in order to prevent future violence. It acknowledges the links between conflict, humanitarian need, and forced displacement, and commits to using development to tackle chronic vulnerabilities and resolve crises with approaches tailored to each partner country.

Perhaps importantly, the new Consensus acknowledges the positive benefits offered by migrants and refugees, recognizing that safe human mobility should be perceived as an

³ European Commission. Communication on establishing a new Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration. 2016. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20160607/communication_external_aspects_eam_towards_new_migration_ompact_en.pdf

⁴ European Council. EU-Turkey Statement. 2016. Available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18-eu-turkey-statement/>

⁵ OECD. International Migration in a Shifting World. 2017. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dev/perspectives-on-global-development-22224475.htm>

⁶ European Policy Centre. “Tackling Irregular Migration Through Development.” 2017. Available at: http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub_7693_tacklingirregularmigrationthroughdevelopment.pdf

⁷ Ibid.

opportunity for host communities to capitalize on a youthful, energetic population on the move. It is no secret that EU and national migration policy has been plagued by overt negative assumptions as to the effects of migration on society, leading to the conclusion that flows must be minimized. On the contrary, numerous data consistently prove that refugee children consistently outperform their peers,⁸ and that newcomers are less likely to commit crimes, especially when they are integrated into their new societies.⁹

Room for improvement:

While new Consensus makes a bold statement to challenge these false assumptions, it unfortunately falls just short of proposing the solutions needed to harness the positive benefits of migration. Despite a lengthy list of activities that the EU will take to better manage migration, such as tackling trafficking and reinforcing illegal returns, there is no mention of efforts to expand legal migration channels, one of the most crucial- yet controversial - elements to promoting safe and orderly migration. Irregular migration channels have proven deadly and exploitative for migrants, who often resort to human smugglers with no other option for recourse. New work and study visa schemes that would not only allow safe opportunities for bright migrants to bring skills into the EU, but also facilitate greater remittances to boost the economies of developing countries.

In order for the EU to implement human-rights based, forward-thinking migration policies, it will need to constructively analyze new and innovative ways to harness the economic and social power of migration. This will require a deeper analysis of the nexus that exists between development and migration, as well as the varying regional factors that drive forced displacement.

With summer rapidly approaching, a new wave of migrants and refugees will inevitably make the perilous voyage across the Mediterranean, risking their lives and the lives of their families. It is the EU's moral imperative to put an end to needless death and suffering.

Recommendations:

- Invest more funding in governance aid, particularly to map local power dynamics and create inclusive political settlements.
- Enabling easy transfer of skills and knowledge from market to market by supporting regional migration, ensuring that migration compliments development assistance.
- Expand legal channels by initiating study/work visa schemes to capitalize on the positive contributions migrants can offer to their host communities.
- Ensure that development funds are prioritized to eradicate extreme poverty, as obligated by Article 208 of the Treaty of the European Union.

⁸ The Independent. "Why everything politicians tell you about young refugees is wrong." 2017. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/britain-brexitee-refugee-children-education-school-job-applications-performance-data-politicians-wrong-a7729911.html>

⁹ Atlantic. "Are Immigrants Prone to Crime and Terrorism." 2016. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2016/06/immigrants-and-crime/486884/>