

FEMISE Annual Conference

29 and 30 April 2017

Casablanca, Morocco

Migration and Refugees' Crisis in the EU-Med:

Dawn of an Era of Shared Responsibility?¹

Concept note

I. Context

People of the EU-Med region have never been so mobile. While events that took place at the South-Med countries in 2010 provided a new voice for freedom and democracy for their population, they also led to an unprecedented increase in their mobility.

Before 2010, most migration flows within the region corresponded to economic migration towards the EU, with migrants seeking better opportunities and a better quality of life. Seven years onward, the migration pattern of the region has changed dramatically and has been overshadowed by refugees and asylum seekers, mainly from Syria, who fled their countries seeking safety and shelter in neighbouring countries and in the European Union (EU).

According to the UNHCR², following the Syrian conflict that is entering its 6th year, the number of Syrian refugees is close to 5 million³. Most refugees crossed the borders to neighbouring countries: Turkey is the largest refugee-hosting country worldwide with more than 2.7 million Syrians; Lebanon comes next as hosting the largest number of refugees in relation to its population (2.2 million representing about 23% of its population); followed by Jordan (more than 600 thousands representing 10% of its population). While neighbouring South-Med Countries host most of the Syrian refugees, the eyes of the world are on Europe: The arrival of more than one million refugees crossing to the EU borders, especially to Greece and Italy has raised humanitarian concerns. The EU is now hosting more than 1.3 million refugees but not all EU countries share the same burden, with higher concentration in Germany, Sweden, Greece and Hungary. These refugees represent less than 0.25% of the total EU population (Hungary has the highest share of 1.8% of its population, while Germany hosts 0.54% of its population)⁴.

The EU-Med region finds itself in a multi-diverse crisis.

1. First and foremost, the refugees, either those in the EU or those in the southern neighbouring countries, are facing a humanitarian crisis, family divisions, extreme living conditions in camps and other hurdles.
2. Second, the southern neighbouring countries hosting the refugees are struggling to cope with the inflows given their already pressured economies and limited resources.
3. Third, the EU countries that are hosting the refugees are facing divisions among themselves and within their population on the impact of those refugees on their economies and how (or whether) to integrate them into their societies.
4. Fourth, despite efforts that have taken place at the international level (UN, EU, IOM, etc.), regional levels, national levels and at the local and municipalities' levels within these

¹ This conference is organised with financial support from the European Union through the FEMISE project on "**Support to Economic Research, studies and dialogues of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership**"

² United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) report on: "Global Trends Forces displacement in 2015"

³ In addition to 6 million that are internally displaced

⁴ Pew research Center analysis of Eurostat data, accessed (June, 2016)

countries, there is still a lot to be done. The lack of coordination and political engagement and the lack of awareness among some hosting populations towards the refugees crisis add to the already complex situation⁵.

Within this challenging environment, there is a shared responsibility within the EU-Med region to take prompt and concrete actions and to unify the different stakeholders (e.g EU, the Southern Med partners, international organisations, EU-Med institutions, local governments and civil societies) through combined internal and external policies to find ways to resolve this crisis and ease the pressure on the region. Moreover, there is a shared responsibility to safeguard, educate, and invest in Syrians' human capital to avoid the loss of their generation and provide a hope, distant as it might appear, that one day peace will be restored and the population will return to reconstruct the country. Post-conflict growth will be a complex and demanding process which will require a clear commitment from the whole international community, the South-Med neighbours and the European Commission in a united effort to restore peace in this country.

The FEMISE annual conference of 2017 comes in a time of tension for the EU-MED region. The conference will provide a platform for those different stakeholders to debate and discuss about this issue in three main plenary sessions and address the following: what is the impact of the refugees' crisis on the Southern Med Countries? How to engage and unify the EU-Med around the same vision with regards to the crisis and the ultimate integration and prosperity objectives; and finally what actions are still needed to provide the necessary humanitarian support, to help the host countries cope with the flows and to help the integration of these refugees within their new societies?

II. Plenary Sessions:

Plenary 1: Impact of the Refugees' Crisis on Neighbouring Southern countries

The arrival of 4.8 million⁶ refugees escaping the war in Syria towards the neighbouring Southern Med Countries has created an unprecedented pressure on these countries' already struggling economies. Within their limited resources, some efforts have been made to provide shelter and basic needs to these people; either at the regional and national levels or through humanitarian aid organizations and other local municipalities. However these efforts are far from enough.

Moreover, economic and social impacts of these flows are already felt in hosting economies. On the economic level, impacts on labour markets, resources and consumption have created pressure on prices in Lebanon and Jordan where the flows of refugees represent 23% and 10% of their population respectively. On the social level, pressures in terms of providing schooling and health services have stretched the already struggling sector.

Therefore, In the first plenary, we aim at addressing the impact of the refugees' crisis on the neighbouring southern Mediterranean countries at the social and economic level, highlighting the existent efforts that took place and focusing on the policies that still need to be implemented at these different levels. Attention will be paid as to what policies could be adopted to mitigate the economic costs of the refugees' flows.

Plenary 2: Unifying an EU-Med vision towards Migration and refugees

Migration and now the refugees' crisis have created more divisions than consensus among politicians, socio-economists, civil society and the general public. Some see these phenomena as

⁵ Survey conducted on 10 EU countries by Pew Research Analysis Center, 2016.

⁶ UNCHR figures as of end of 2016

an opportunity for a demographically changing and aging Europe to fill employment gaps⁷. Others see migration as a socioeconomic challenge that could lead to increasing unemployment, lowering salaries, pressures on the social services, etc. In addition, issues of security threats and terrorism have been in the heart of the debates with regards to the flows of refugees towards Europe⁸.

At the same time, this crisis has increased tensions among Members' states due to the disproportionate burden some of them face (e.g. Italy and Greece). According to UNHCR, over 1 million refugees and migrants arrived in Europe in 2015 and the overwhelming majority crossed through Greece, a country that is already in the midst of an unprecedented economic crisis. Moreover, the refugees' crisis has affected EU national policies, the media and public opinions (e.g. Brexit).

Therefore, the second plenary seeks providing a platform for debates on different views with the aim to address the economic and social impact due to the arrival of these refugees in the EU economies, to highlight the efforts that have taken place so far and the needs that still haven't been fulfilled. Last but not least, discussions will revolve around possible ways to move the EU-Med region towards a more unified vision in facing this crisis and to restore social cohesion.

Plenary 3: What actions are still needed to face the refugees' crisis

In facing this unprecedented EU-Med crisis, some actions need to be taken place immediately: (1) in the short term, there is a need to ensure the safety and the delivery of the basic needs of the refugees (particularly to improve on the conditions of the different refugees camps); (2) there is a need to ensure that the refugees, and specially their children receive education to avoid a lost generation of Syrians; find ways to integrate those refugees in their hosting societies, etc. and (3) it will be important to raise awareness among the public that refugees or migrants are not threats but that they could make positive contributions to their economies.

There are some concrete actions that have taken place from different international organisations and communities, such as the following:

- Calling for a shared responsibility to support the EU members on the front lines of the refugees flows (i.e. Italy and Greece), the EU reallocated about 120 thousands across the EU countries. At the same time, the EU-Turkey Statement to host migrants within the Turkish borders has dramatically reduced the number of refugees arriving to the EU.
- Countries of the Southern Mediterranean have stretched their budgets to accommodate the refugees and the EU has contributed almost 1.1 billion Euros to both Jordan and Lebanon in humanitarian, development, economic and stabilisation assistance. This includes programs to fund education of Syrians and other projects as well.
- The UN has also taken important actions, other than humanitarian ones, to support the settlement of these refugees. The UN political summit declaration (New York, Sept 2016) with the heads of States, agreed on a number of commitments towards refugees⁹.
- The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has joined forces with the European Commission to provide more support to the refugees through different channels.
- Efforts are taking place at the local level as well. Mediterranean municipalities provide urgent assistance to migrants and refugees, even with the often absence of a national response plan (ex. In Greece and Italy). Mayors call for a fair distribution of responsibilities, practical and financial support from Europe and the exchange of good practices.

⁷ António Guterres (now the UN General Secretary) emphasized the positive effect of migrants on Europe in his speech at the Vision Europe Summit, July 2016: "*Without migrants, European societies would be unsustainable*".

⁸ According to the Pew Research Center survey, 58% of the Europeans surveyed see the arrival of refugees as an increase in the likelihood of terrorism in their country.

⁹ to protect human rights, condemning xenophobia against refugees and migrants while strengthening the positive contributions that they can bring to their host countries, strengthening the global governance of migration.

The face of the EU-Med region is changing and it is important to raise awareness among hosting populations and create bridges between the decision makers and the people and to understand that refugees are not numbers but real families that have encountered perils to reach safety. The EU-Med region can still achieve its main objective and vision of shared peace and prosperity. This can be achieved with efforts from the whole international community, the neighbouring countries, the EU to unify their vision and push towards restoring peace in Syria. Saving the Syrians human capital and investing in their younger generation is the only way that this country could be reconstructed again with the return of its population after the war. But to do so, one needs to answer some key questions: What unified vision could be undertaken? What policies from the EU and neighbouring countries?

III. Structure of the conference

The conference comprises three main parts:

- (1) Three plenary sessions focusing on the main theme of the Conference;
- (2) Three thematic sessions including the presentations of the research progress of selected projects funded by FEMISE (through the European Commission grant); and
- (3) The General Assembly meeting for members of the network.



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