

MIGRATION IN EUROPE: BRIDGING THE SOLIDARITY GAP

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Painfully and hesitatingly, the EU has managed to stem its migration crisis, regaining control of its borders and ensuring a dramatic drop in the flow of migrants. Yet, the migration issue is not going away, and the political debate around it persists. Europeans need to work together in a field where in the past they have been eager to act on their own; and they must define an integrated policy based on a genuine sense of solidarity.

Urgent Responses and Lingering Political Gaps

- The migration situation of 2015 was unique for Europe. For the first time, the EU had to find a collective response to this crisis because of its scale and intensity and the involvement of many countries along the route followed by the migrants.
- Europe's response was essentially shaped by a sense of urgency. It was a short-term fix that allowed the EU to regain control of its external borders and end hasty unilateral moves by some member states. An agreement with Turkey set up practical arrangements that contributed to calming the situation on the ground and updating processes for asylum applications and returns.
- Deep-seated political divisions in the union on the migration issue remain. In particular, not all member states are ready to accept a fair share of the migration burden, undermining the principle of unity and risking fragmentation and free riding.

A Long-Term Policy of Flexible Solidarity

- A solid and realistic EU migration policy based on a common understanding of the type of migration the union needs would prove that Europe can efficiently tackle issues that matter to the average citizen.
- EU member states need to engage in a process of flexible solidarity that can shape the elements of a comprehensive migration policy: asylum regime, border controls, resettlement schemes, legal migration, and societal integration.
- EU members will have to address some of the contentious issues they have so far avoided: whether burden sharing should be compulsory or voluntary, whether migration should be permanent or temporary, whether to implement financial solidarity, and whether to allow limits on the free movement of workers.
- The EU must adopt a different narrative with third countries. The tailor-made agreement with Turkey cannot be the exclusive template for all future external agreements. An approach focused too much on returns and readmissions risks being unable to convince Europe's partners to initiate true collaboration for lack of mutual trust.

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