Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 1 October 2019
(OR. en)

12608/19

LIMITE

JAI 1003
ASIM 106
MIGR 156
RELEX 880
FRONT 256

NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Evidence-based and forward-looking migration policies - Presidency discussion paper

Evidence-based and forward-looking migration policies

In 2015 Europe faced mass migration movements that it was not prepared for, even though it has later been illustrated that there had been early warning signs from Africa and the Middle East which could have been noted and acted upon. The EU and the Member States struggled to handle the sudden surge of irregular arrivals and it became evident that there was a need to better anticipate migratory movements and forced displacement.

Since the crisis, many different tools to improve the monitoring and anticipation of future migratory flows have been designed. Today, a lot of information on current migratory movements and forced displacement, as well as data on new migratory trends and relevant factors behind these trends are collected and analysed by various EU institutions and agencies, Member States and international, European and national organisations.

One example of the tools available at EU level is the Integrated Situational Awareness and Analysis (ISAA) report, which provides information on the most relevant recent developments in migration and asylum in and towards the EU. Other EU-level tools try to predict the near future, such as the Early Warning Reports issued by the EASO and the three-month forecasting reports produced by the EBCGA, which present short-term risk analyses based on changes in the monitored push factors of migration. Recently the EU has funded several projects which aim to look even further by building scenarios on what migration to Europe might look like in five, ten or fifteen years.

The Presidency believes that these tools could be put to greater use, for example basing strategic migratory discussions on scientific research and evidence, addressing the structural aspects which shape migration and forced displacement and helping to design evidence-based policies. The Presidency wants to enhance knowledge about existing tools for migration early warning, forecasting and foresight, and discuss what kind of additional information regarding future migration and forced displacement would further benefit the EU and the Member States. In addition to the EU-level tools, some Member States have their own alert systems and foresight methods, and sharing their experiences could be beneficial to other Member States and EU institutions.

Finally, it is noted that the available tools and the evidence they provide do not always effectively meet policy needs in the EU. To seek to address this, the Presidency wants to invite Member States to reflect on the broader synergies between evidence on migratory flows and policy-making, and how to improve them.

Adopting a strategic, future-oriented and evidence-based approach to migration fits well within the terms of reference of the HLWG, as this Working Group was tasked in its revised ToR of 2002 to analyse and monitor migratory trends, from a numerical as well as from a thematic point of view, and propose measures and take initiatives. In the Council conclusions of May 2012, the HLWG was recognised as the central steering forum for strategic discussions and initiatives in relation to the GAMM and was tasked to prepare the ground for concrete actions to implement it.

The Presidency does not only want to discuss the added value of linking migration early warning systems, forecasts and scenarios to policy-making, but also intends to encourage more forward-looking discussions in the forthcoming HLWG meetings. Discussions in the HLWG should be based on evidence provided especially by EU institutions and agencies and should focus on the issues arising from this evidence. Reciprocally, discussions in the HLWG should guide the focus of EU institutions and agencies in their migration-related analyses and actions.

Against this information and the background paper provided by the MPI, the Member States are invited to consider the following questions:

1. What kind of early warning, forecasting or foresight tools does your Member State use to monitor and anticipate migration and what experiences have you had with these tools? How are the information and analysis linked to policy-making? What kind of tools would be useful at national level?

2. What kind of near-future predictions of migratory flows does the EU need? How could we better utilise the tools we already have, such as early warning reports by the EASO, and link this information to policy-making in the EU?

3. What kind of information and analyses of future migration scenarios are we lacking in the EU? How could we better take into consideration the outcomes of migration scenarios already at our disposal and link these analyses to policy-making in the EU?

4. How could we promote the practice suggested above, whereby the HLWG would further link its forthcoming discussions to analyses provided by EU institutions and agencies? How can we encourage the HLWG's contribution to be better taken into account by EU institutions and agencies in their migration-related analyses and actions?

Preparing for Future Migration Trends

Using forecasting and scenario-building for forward-looking policies

Background Brief for the HLWG on the 11th of October 2019

With growing numbers of refugees and migrants on the move, destination countries in Europe and elsewhere are exploring ways to improve their capacity to anticipate and respond to migration trends. Following the 2015-16 crisis, investments in this area prioritised making stakeholders more attuned to early signs of migration surges, by improving the European Union's capacity to collect, share, and analyse data on migration flows and routes and map out clear policy responses. But as Europe moves out of 'crisis' mode, EU and national authorities are also investing in their capacity to explore how different migration trends and drivers may evolve and interact over longer time periods, and develop policy responses for a range of different migration scenarios.

To develop more forward-looking migration policies, policymakers can now access tools that collate various types of quantitative and qualitative data to provide informed insights about migration trends and flows in the immediate or near future (early warning systems), across different time horizons (forecasting), or on a longer-term basis (foresight and scenario-building) (see the table on page 3 for an overview). **Early warning systems** monitor migration trends and/or potential drivers of forced migration, with the goal of signalling surges in migration to policymakers with as much advance warning as possible. These systems use a combination of quantitative and qualitative inputs (e.g. data on migration flows and expert insights), and increasingly also use 'big data' from sources such as satellite imagery and social media to help track trends and provide insights into the motivations driving flows. For example, early warnings can trace patterns in the data that suggest an increasing intensity in border disputes, and then alert national authorities of cross-border movements before they arise. While this can help governments to plan their resources accordingly, these systems can realistically only provide insights on short-term developments. The European Union has invested in this area primarily through the European Asylum and Support Office (EASO), which set up an Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS) in 2013 to gather information on all 30 EU+ countries under indicators focusing on all key stages of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS).[1] Alongside several other initiatives,[2] the European Union also commissioned in-house research to improve policymakers' knowledge of the factors driving asylum-related flows. Notably, the Knowledge Centre on Migration and

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1 EASO, 'Analysis and Statistics', accessed 24 September 2019, https://www.easo.europa.eu/analysis-and-statistics.

2 For example, Frontex publishes quarterly risk analyses on migration flows and the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) introduced the Integrated Situational Awareness and Analysis (ISAA) weekly reports, which have supported a more evidence-based discussion geared towards a concerted crisis response. Frontex, 'Monitoring & Risk Analysis', accessed 11 September 2019, https://frontex.europa.eu/intelligence/monitoring-risk-analysis/; Council of the European Union, 'The EU Integrated Political Crisis Response – IPCR', 2016, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/29699/web_ipcr.pdf.

Demography (KCMD) has contributed towards this goal by analysing big data to better capture the complexity of real-time changes in migration drivers.[3]

Alternatively, if policymakers are looking to better understand the factors driving migration on a longer-term basis, they can look to forecasting methods or even embark on scenario-building exercises to help them prepare for different eventualities. **Migration forecasts** seek to map movements in the future (usually over a five-to-ten-year period) using quantitative data on past movements and some qualitative insights on the drivers of migration (e.g. via expert input). These projections can help inform operational and strategic planning over the short-to-medium term, although they are less reliable when it comes to predicting more spontaneous flows (e.g. asylum trends). Foresight exercises such as **scenario-building,** on the other hand, work with this uncertainty by analysing a range of possible trends and exploring how these factors may interact to develop a range of future migration scenarios (e.g. through stakeholder interviews). These exercises are not necessarily predictive but are a useful tool for policymakers to understand where uncertainties lie and to proactively design policy responses for different scenarios.

For example, three migration scenarios developed by the Joint Research Centre illustrate how forecasting and foresight techniques can help policymakers better understand long-term migration trends from and within Africa (see Box 1). These scenarios describe how a set of key determinants (i.e. demography, socio-economic development, climate change, political instability and geopolitical factors) potentially interact with each other to shape future emigration trends on the continent. While Scenario 1 assumes a continuation of current trends typical of traditional forecasting, Scenario 2 and 3 factor in changes in economic growth and climate that will likely increase emigration rates over the coming few decades. Notably, these alternative futures differ in terms of their predictability: whereas Scenario 1 and 2 largely rely on quantifiable trends by using demographic and development indicators, Scenario 3 looks at a more complex chain of developments induced by extreme weather events, which can produce different types of internal and international mobility.

Box 1. Three Scenarios of Future Socio-economic, Demographic and Migratory Development in Africa

Scenario 1 is based on a continuation of current socio-economic development trends, with current (2015) emigration rates remaining constant, and population growth remaining high in line with current trends. Under this scenario, the annual number of mobile Africans leaving their country of origin would increase from 1.4 million in 2015 to 2.8 million in 2050.

Scenario 2 assumes more rapid socio-economic development (e.g. more direct investments, access to better education, faster decline in fertility rates) and, as a result, lower population growth and higher emigration rates. This is the result of a convergence of the median emigration rate of Africa's low-income countries towards that of Africa's middle-income countries. According to this model, the annual number of Africans leaving their country of origin will increase from 1.4 million in 2015 to 3.5 million in 2050.

Scenario 3 assumes a disruption of socio-economic development in several African countries induced by climate change. Extended heat waves affect around 8 percent (149 million people) of the projected population living in Africa in 2100. Higher surface temperatures also contribute to desertification and water scarcity in turn triggering a rise in unrest and political violence. Alongside an increase in internal displacement and mobility, these developments also cause a rise in displacement and emigration rates, particularly in already fragile states.

Source: Fabrizio Natale, Silvia Migali, and Rainer Munz. 'Many more to come? Migration from and within Africa', EU Science Hub, 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/many-more-come-migration-and-within-africa.

3 KCMD, 'Dynamic Data Hub', accessed 24 September 2019, https://bluehub.jrc.ec.europa.eu/migration/app/.

Overall, this scenario-building exercise can help policymakers better understand the implications of today's migration policies and development efforts on future migration trends, increase their preparedness for unexpected shocks that could disrupt emigration rates over time, and enable them to think more strategically about future cooperation with third countries on these issues. These types of scoping exercises also hold potential for policymakers to detect current gaps in data collection and analysis that limit their ability to design evidence-based and forward-looking policies. Acknowledging these limitations is instrumental in creating the 'out-of-the-box' thinking required to prepare for a range of expected and less expected migration scenarios.

Forecasting and foresight techniques offer an exciting opportunity for European policymakers to expand their knowledge of future migration dynamics and develop more forward-looking migration policies. Previous research and capacity-building efforts in this area are set to advance as the European Union moves towards new investments in migration scenarios under the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme; greater operability of large-scale, centralised IT and data systems on security, migration, and external border management; and increasing institutional cooperation on methodologies for big data, forecasting and monitoring in 2019-2021 (i.e. between EASO and Frontex). Bringing future projections and different migration scenarios developed under these initiatives into formal policy planning will help policymakers better weigh the consequences of today's decisions on future migration dynamics. It will also help them, for example, calibrate their approach to cooperation with third countries accordingly, and understand how their decisions could link to other policy areas, such as development or trade**.** Ultimately, policymakers should view their use of forecasting and scenario-building methods as an opportunity not to reduce uncertainty, but as a way to acknowledge these uncertainties exist and instead try to systematically build them into policy planning.

	Methods policymakers can use to anticipate migration trends and flows		
	Early warning systems	**Forecasting (e.g. modelling)**	**Foresight (e.g. scenario-building)**
Across which time horizons do they apply?	Short term (days, weeks or months ahead)	Mostly over the short-to-medium term (five-to-ten years ahead)	Long term (years or decades ahead)
How do they typically work?	Monitor migration trends or potential drivers of migration and forced displacement in real time, sometimes drawing on the analysis of 'big data' (e.g. social media and satellite imagery)	Typically use quantitative data to map movements in the future, based on the assumption that future trends will follow similar dynamics to current patterns (can be complemented with qualitative data)	Systematically map contextual factors (ranging from more certain factors such as demographic growth to less certain factors such as climate hazards) to create and analyse a range of possible future migration trends
What aspects of migration policymaking are they best suited for?	Track fast-changing situations and highlight possible migration or displacement risks as early as possible with relatively high predictability (e.g. by allowing policymakers to decide pre-emptively how and where to commit additional resources)	Trace changes in structural factors and migration intentions to better understand how migration trends evolve over time (e.g. by producing relatively concrete estimates about future migration trends, such as anticipated changes in the level of visa applications)	Help policymakers reflect on the various outcomes of longer-term migration and understand where uncertainties lie to develop proactive policy programming for different scenarios (e.g. by mapping how migration trends could impact governments' operational capacities, budgets, and long-term policy investments)
What are their key short-comings?	Rely on analytical capacity to interpret and respond to these data; not fit for designing more strategic migration policies	Do not explicitly address the uncertainty of migratory phenomena; rely on a certain theory of change ('more of the same')	Have a relatively low predictability as they rely on long time frames and binary categories which tend to produce ambiguous results
How have EU actors engaged with these methods (examples)?	The European Asylum Support Office's (EASO) Early warning and Preparedness System gathers information under indicators focusing on all key stages of the CEAS	The European Parliamentary Research Service's (EPRS) Global Trends Unit has produced forecasts on long-term migration in the European Union	The Joint Research Centre's (JRC) Scenario Exploration System engages EU policymakers and other stakeholders in foresight scenarios through an interactive research process