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Migration as an opportunity for European development

Committee Opinion[1]
Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development
Rapporteur: Ms Petra De SUTTER, Belgium, Socialist Group

A. Conclusions of the committee

1. The Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development welcomes the report on "Migration as an opportunity for European development" prepared by Mr Andrea Rigoni and approved unanimously by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons on 27 April 2017. It shares the concern about recent portrayals of migrants as a threat and supports the need to put in place new evidence-based, realistic and forward-looking migration policies in Europe.

2. Whilst contributing to the positive message about migrants and migration, the Social Affairs Committee wishes to highlight the effects of migration on both the countries of origin and destination from the social angle. It also proposes several amendments to the draft resolution, in order to assist the integration of all migrants and the full respect of their fundamental rights.

B. Proposed amendments

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 5, after the words "evidence-based", insert the words ", realistic and forward-looking".

Explanatory note:

To reap the benefits of migration, member States have to adopt a strategic approach to regulating migration.

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 7, before the words "legal opportunities for migration to Europe", insert the word "safe".

Explanatory note:

Pathways for migration must be safe procedures, safer than the current "hotspots".

1. Reference to committee: Doc. 13974, Reference 4196 of 22 April 2016. Reporting committee: Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons. See Doc. 14335. Opinion approved by the committee on 1 June 2017.

Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 9.1.2, add the following words:

> *", as well as providing opportunities and integration measures that specifically target low-skilled and less educated migrants"*

Explanatory note:

Low-skilled and less educated migrants could also be very beneficial for Europe, if only they received the right support in the form of opportunities and integration measures.

Amendment D (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 9.3.6, insert the following paragraph:

> *"ensuring access to affordable and adequate health services for all migrants, regardless of their legal status;"*

Explanatory note:

Next to education and citizenship, access to health care is paramount to promoting inclusive societies, notably by enabling the full and active participation of migrants. The latest Health Evidence Network (HEN) report of the World Health Organization (WHO) (2016) demonstrates that variations of definitions used for different groups of migrants in different areas affect access to health care. Legal status emerged as one of the most significant factors in determining whether migrants were able to access affordable and adequate health services.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Petra De Sutter, rapporteur for opinion

1. Integration of national economies in Europe, globalisation and changing demographics, but also armed conflicts, environmental disasters and the search for greater well-being have altogether intensified migration flows inside and into Europe, in particular towards high-income countries.[2] This new reality has been exploited by extremist and populist parties, as well as certain media outlets, all stoking fears among the local population, often on the basis of distorted or exaggerated facts. To reassure the population and provide dignified support to migrants, the State authorities across Europe need to adapt their migration policies in such a manner that the impact of migration on both the countries of origin and of destination are optimised in full respect of human rights and European values. Ignoring the need for accommodating the phenomenon of increased migration is no longer a tenable position.

2. Given the widespread negative perception of the consequences of migration, the positive voice on migrants in Mr Rigoni's report is a powerful message and a roadmap for action. It offers concrete answers to the Parliamentary Assembly's concerns about the leading negative approach to migration: the perceived threats could be turned into opportunities for development and hence enhanced prosperity for the local population and migrants alike. This, however, requires a strategic approach by the State authorities.

3. Migration, whether intra-European or from outside the continent, provides for the mobility of talents, skills and competences. Given the existing shortages in the labour force in Europe, all migrants should get a fair chance to access the labour market, irrespective of their skills, education or health status. If such access cannot be guaranteed, the risk is that migrants may take jobs in the informal economy, with the resulting weakening of their social protection, losses to the State budget from non-perceived social contributions and possibly even exploitation in clandestine workshops or criminal circuits.[3]

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2. "Perspectives on Global Development 2017. International Migration in a Shifting World", OECD (2016).

3. For instance, see the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights regarding *Chowdury and Others v. Greece* of 30 March 2017 (Article 4.2 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5)), where the Court held that the State had failed in its obligations to prevent the situation of human trafficking and forced labour for 42 Bangladeshi nationals.

4. Healthy low-skilled and less educated migrants could also be very beneficial for Europe, if the necessary targeted policy measures are implemented. Therefore, we have to provide better information on available jobs, more training options and adequate integration measures that specifically target this category of migrants. Moreover, State authorities must ensure that all migrants receive a decent salary that corresponds to their skills and helps prevent social dumping.

5. The “brain drain” effects of migration on source countries (which include many Council of Europe member States) should not be underestimated. Whereas destination countries clearly benefit from this “brain gain” through the influx of well-qualified migrants seeking a higher income, the countries of origin lose their investment in the education of emigrants – unless they devise policies that attract them back, or compensate by integrating skilled migrants from other countries.

6. The reality about irregular migration is that only a fraction of migrants will be allowed to stay. For those who can stay, it is good policy to promote targeted national regularisation programmes, and for those who cannot stay, we have to ensure humane treatment with full respect for fundamental rights. We also have to show due care for family needs through social policies so that no children are left behind either in source countries of migrants or in destination countries. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights has repeatedly pointed out that migrant children are one of the most vulnerable population groups in Europe and “often are denied basic health care and education, and run the risk of being exploited by traffickers or smugglers”. This is why a call for action to promote inclusive societies, as highlighted in the draft resolution put forward by the Migration Committee, warrants our urgent attention and full support.

7. International humanitarian standards and guidelines exist. It is, therefore, not necessary to search for new standards, but to effectively apply the existing ones. In order to do so, it is important to recall them and assist member States in adapting their policies for implementation. Finally, although the global governance of migratory flows is very limited at present, it is the duty of the Assembly to also remind member States of their migration-related commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals; those commitments can be upheld through proper use of the major Council of Europe instruments, in particular the European Social Charter treaty system.