

ICMPD Migration Outlook 2021: A first look at key trends and post COVID-19 scenarios.

Vienna, 26 January 2021: **2021 will be another challenging year for EU migration policy. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has not only caused a global health crisis of historic proportions but is also the event that impacted International migration in 2020 more than any other. It will continue to shape the migration year of 2021 according to the “ICMPD Migration Outlook 2021”, a landmark publication released by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD).**

The ongoing pandemic has cut off mobility pathways, stranded migrants, destroyed jobs and incomes, reduced remittances and pushed millions of migrants and vulnerable populations into poverty. It has, however, not put an end to migration. Illegal border crossings into the EU reduced by only -7,8%. In comparison, the mobility of tourism has reduced by -70%. In 2020, irregular arrivals shifted away from the Eastern Mediterranean Route (-75%) to the Central Mediterranean (+155%) and the Western Balkans (105%) Routes. The Western African Route (to the Canary Islands) saw an increase of almost 900% compared to 2019.

It can be assumed that both the long-term drivers of migration and the short- to medium-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will increase, rather than decrease, existing global imbalances and migration pressures in 2021. Europe should prepare for a difficult new migration year and invest in global partnership and cooperation to address the related challenges.

“The uneven access to vaccines in 2021 will cause a strong imbalance between rich and poor countries. This will result in an uneven economic recovery which might lead to new and stronger migration flows.” said **Michael Spindelegger**, Director General of ICMPD. “Better health care in Europe can turn into a magnet for immigration. In the EU you get vaccinated for free. This might be very attractive for migrants from Africa, Latin America and Asia. That's why we expect an increase in illegal immigration.”

The “ICMPD Migration Outlook 2021” intends to look ahead and to forecast major developments for the upcoming year at the EU and national levels. Although forecasts on migration are difficult to make, our 2021 outlook identified 7 key factors that will shape the migration year in Europe and beyond:

1. The development of the COVID-19 crisis

The size and direction of formal and informal migration flows will be influenced by the speed in which economies recover or are further pushed into recession.

2. Uneven access to vaccines and economic recovery as migration drivers

Higher income countries will recover faster, both economically and socially, and the resulting imbalances will increase short-time migration pressures in 2021.

3. Enhanced migration policy pressures in the aftermath of the pandemic

European policymakers should be prepared to explain to their electorates why the economic rebound does not immediately reduce unemployment of the resident population and why newly emerging jobs are filled with immigrants.

4. Setbacks in migration cooperation with non-EU partners

The EU should place full emphasis on the further development of its migration partnerships to ensure cooperation on migration with countries that are hit even harder by the pandemic.

5. Migration impact of newly emerging crises like the Sahel

The rise in arrivals along the Central Mediterranean Route and on the Canary Islands Route in 2020 indicate that related flows might play an increasingly significant role in 2021 as well.

6. Shifts along the main migration routes to Europe

In 2021, much will depend on continued cooperation between the EU on the one side and Turkey and Libya on the other. The EU should be prepared to respond equally quickly to shifts along the main migration routes.

7. The continued work on the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum

The focus in 2021 will be on strengthening the further development of migration partnerships with important countries of origin and transit for migration to Europe. In view of globally increased migration pressures caused by the pandemic, such prioritisation would seem very reasonable.

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The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) is an international organisation with 18 Member States and more than 350 staff members. Active in more than 90 countries worldwide, it takes a regional approach in its work to create efficient cooperation and partnerships along migration routes. Priority regions include Africa, Central and South Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Its three-pillar approach to migration management – structurally linking research, migration

dialogues and capacity building – contributes to better migration policy development worldwide. The Vienna-based organisation has a mission in Brussels, a regional office in Malta and project offices in several countries. ICMPD receives funding from its Member States, the European Commission, the UN, and other multilateral institutions, as well as bilateral donors. Founded in 1993, ICMPD holds UN observer status and cooperates with more than 700 partners including EU institutions and UN agencies.

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