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COMMENTARY ON THE OCCASION OF THE 10TH EU ANTI-TRAFFICKING DAY

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18 October 2016 is the 10th EU Anti-Trafficking Day. In a three-part-blog series, ICMPD analyses challenges and future priorities for the EU and its Member States in combating trafficking in human beings. In view of the forthcoming EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy, we're looking at current anti-trafficking efforts in the context of global migration trends and policies, asking the question of how current debates might shape anti-trafficking in the coming years.

In 2016, **EU Anti-Trafficking Day** on 18 October will be observed for the tenth time, as the first ever EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings covering the period 2012 – 2016 comes to an end. We therefore consider it timely to take stock of current developments and identify priorities for the coming years. This year's first ever UN High-Level Summit on Refugees and Migrants on 19 September resulted in the adoption of the [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#), a set of commitments with the stated objectives of saving lives, respecting rights and sharing responsibilities on a global scale.

In the background of these presentations, speeches, summits and workshops, are the girls and boys, women and men, who are on the move, fleeing conflict, violence or persecution. It must be remembered, in the [words](#) of the Kenyan-born Somali poet Warsan Shire, that *"you only leave home when home won't let you stay"*, and that *"no one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land"*.

While the migratory flows to Europe are diverse and heterogeneous, the spike in refugee numbers is first and foremost a result of conflict rather than economic precarity. Whether it's the war in Syria and parts of Iraq, the violent instability in Afghanistan and Libya, or indefinite military conscription in Eritrea – forced migration accounted for a large portion of the overall migratory flows.

Some of these people on the move have been deceived, or threatened with violence or psychological intimidation, and put in situations of abuse, exploitation or trafficking. But for these people, this desperate situation may be the only way they can survive, feed their

families, or keep their families safe. Europe has faced a crisis of migration policy in 2015 and 2016, and the price for the gaps and failures continues to be paid, ultimately, by these children and adults.

It is at this crossroads that we observe the 10th EU Anti-Trafficking Day, the conclusion of the first EU anti-trafficking strategy and the declaration by world leaders on a new global approach to protecting refugees and migrants. We do this with a constant focus on the people directly affected, who are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. This first blog in the series focuses on the need for coherence between anti-trafficking policy and the wider migration policy framework. We argue that legislation, policy and initiatives to combat irregular migration and migrant smuggling, and on asylum, must not unintentionally render people more vulnerable to trafficking in human beings (THB).

Preventing vulnerability to trafficking and the unintended consequences of restrictive migration policies (11/10/2016)

The unintended consequences of restrictive migration policies on vulnerability to trafficking are already understood to a certain extent. For example, increased border controls lead to increased reliance on smugglers for crossing borders, and the use of more dangerous and expensive routes, all of which can render people more vulnerable to trafficking.

While protecting trafficked people and prosecuting perpetrators in trafficking cases is of course crucial, the first, overriding priority of any strategy or policy to combat trafficking should be to prevent the crime from occurring in the first place. However, anti-trafficking policy must not only respond to the trafficking of migrants, refugees and separated and unaccompanied children post facto. The unintended consequences of related migration and security policy frameworks on vulnerability to trafficking, including asylum, migrant smuggling and irregular migration, and border management, must also be equally explored, understood and addressed. By ensuring all relevant policy frameworks contribute to preventing trafficking, we can better guarantee protection from trafficking, exploitation and abuse.

EU policies preventing trafficking in human beings

The 2012 – 2016 EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings specified clear actions to prevent trafficking, such as EU-wide awareness-raising activities and campaigns, partnerships with the private sector, and addressing demand for trafficking. Furthermore, the strategy called for policy coherence to ensure that action against trafficking is also included in other related policy areas.

While taking into account the humanitarian needs of transit countries and the EU's push for orderly migration, expanding access to legal migration channels remains an important issue for source countries who face youth unemployment and poor living conditions. In the long run, any successful migration policy needs to prevent irregular migration and strengthen alternatives allowing for safe, legal and voluntary migration.

Fruitful co-operation with transit countries and countries of origin can only be based on mutual trust and a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to migration. This involves taking into consideration the needs of source countries that have a vested interest in moving towards a sustainable migration regime that utilises migration as an instrument for development while fighting against different forms of irregular migration and organised crime. Such an approach requires looking at migration as being part of a wider developmental process that fits into a larger global trend and should be aligned with the UN's sustainable development target of providing for orderly and well-managed migration.

Anticipating Migration Challenges of the Future

In order to effectively manage migration today, it is crucial to understand how orderly migration can have a positive impact on both sending and receiving societies in the future. At ICMPD we are firmly dedicated to providing countries and societies with the knowledge and tools to adequately integrate migration into their long-term economic, social, and demographic strategies. This is a particularly urgent task given the projected regional demographic, economic, and social changes, including a sharp decline in Europe's working age population in the decades to come. Given the increased availability of both information and resources for a large number of ambitious young people in regions bordering Europe, states need to prepare both their migrations systems and their populations by designing comprehensive migration policies and practices adapted for the future. This is the only viable alternative to having the smugglers decide who gets to come.

It is important to keep in mind that migration is part and parcel of a megatrend of global mobility that is not confined to a specific geographical area. Identifying complementarities between the needs of source, transit, and destination countries is the key to a successful future-oriented migration policy. When properly managed, migration can be mutually beneficial for countries facing a myriad of challenges ranging from youth unemployment and labour mismatch to aging populations and welfare systems under stress. As an organisation, ICMPD places particular emphasis on preparing countries and societies for mid to long-term changes related to migration with a broad set of tools, experience, and knowledge at our disposal.

Most importantly, out of the migration policy crisis in 2015 comes a reinvigorated European and global understanding of the urgent need for a holistic approach to migration based on evidence-based policies and close partnerships bolstered by a sense of shared responsibility. Addressing the immediate concerns of refugees and asylum seekers seeking safety must go hand in hand with developing a more comprehensive future-oriented legal migration regime. Migration does not need to be ‘a problem’, but rather represents a series of opportunities and challenges that need to be effectively managed on an international level.

*This is an excerpt of the **ICMPD Annual Report 2015**. [Read more](#) policy briefs, speeches and interviews or [download](#) the annual report in its entirety.*

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