

31 May 2021

REVITALISING MIGRATION PARTNERSHIPS

by Martijn Pluim

As Europe seeks a revitalised, comprehensive approach to migration, cooperation with partners along migration routes is set to play a critical role. This is reflected in the European Union’s [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#), wherein partnerships feature throughout. Their utility was also highlighted multiple times during the recent [Ministerial Conference on Migration Flow Management](#), held under the Portuguese Presidency of the EU Council – for which migration policy and border management constitute key priorities. “Redefining migration partnerships” also forms the theme of Malta’s ICMPD Chairmanship in 2021, investigating ways to redefine migration cooperation to produce ‘win-win’ situations and strike up truly beneficial, sustainable relationships.

There is no doubt that partnerships are an essential tool of migration policy, but how can they be improved to strengthen migration cooperation and governance?

Tapping the partnership potential

Whilst they can bring many benefits, developing and maintaining partnerships is a complex process, requiring a thoughtful approach if their full potential is to be tapped. Drawing on the ICMPD experience of implementing hundreds of international projects – and as Secretariat of migration dialogues such as the [Budapest](#), [Prague](#), [Khartoum](#) and [Rabat](#) Processes, the below lessons learned highlight areas for action as policymakers seek to revitalise partnerships as a core tool of migration governance.

Anticipate different perspectives, avoid simplification

Generalisations and simplifications, often based in anecdote, can do untold harm – especially in bilateral relations, be it between states, regions or continents. It is instead essential to understand the various perspectives of participating partners, including their objectives, expectations and challenges.

And to look at the broader picture: What do states have in common and where do they differ?

Looking at Africa and Europe, much of the commonality in fact lies in the different needs and expectations of the individual states of each continent. The African Union has 55 Member States, whilst the EU has 27. The partnership expectations of Tunisia thus may well differ from those of South Africa or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the current chair of the AU. In similar fashion, within the EU, Sweden's specific set of objectives will differ from those of Greece, Austria or Portugal.

When discussing partnerships, we should proactively anticipate such differences, better developing the targeted approaches necessary to respond to the diverse dynamics of different states.

Understand the operational realities, treat all as equals

Working as partners requires sound understanding of the prevailing operational and political realities. In particular, the political context creates opportunities and sets limitations on the partnership in identifying common objectives. For this reason, all parties must approach each other on an equal footing, rather than with strength or extortion. Only under these conditions can migration partnerships address a host of concrete initiatives and thematic areas, be it border management, anti-trafficking in persons, skills development, legal migration or return and reintegration.

Illustrating this need for equality, within the Continent-to-Continent cooperation on migration, the AU Commission and the European Commission have identified specific topics on which concrete progress can be made. Despite the current securitised discourse and the perception that such matters form the only agenda points, both parties remain eager to discuss a wide variety of issues, including remittances, diaspora investment, legal migration and mobility and information sharing on smuggling and trafficking, as well as return, readmission and reintegration.

Our experience has shown clearly that trusting, open, informed and equal cooperation lies at the core of true (and effective) migration partnership.

Frame issues for practical cooperation on all sides

Whilst some migration topics may appear controversial on the surface, it is often not so much their sensitive subject matter but the framing that is important for advancing partnerships. It is therefore critical to take into account the interests of all partners, and devise ways to realise these in practical terms.

In the city of Enugu, Nigeria, for instance, ICMPD developed a project that combines migration, investment, skills development and sustainable reintegration. We have focused

on expanding skillsets as a means to contribute to the development agenda of Nigeria, attract foreign direct investment and respond to the skills needs of participating European countries.

In the Mediterranean region, ICMPD is developing the Training Institute for Migration Capacity Partnership together with the Government of Malta. This initiative aims to establish a permanent and accredited vocational migration training institute for the Mediterranean region, focused on the further professionalisation of migration agencies.

Doing more to harness partnership potential

As the Secretariat for various migration dialogues, we see on a daily basis that there is much more room for concrete cooperation and partnerships. At this critical juncture, it is up to all of us to seize the current opportunities with both hands and capitalise upon the momentum created by the Ministerial Conference on Migration Flow Management, the Pact, and numerous bilateral and multilateral initiatives.

Among the positive outcomes of the present crisis, let there be increased cooperation, closer partnership and true solidarity.

Contact Information

For more information please contact:

Policy Unit

International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)
Gonzagagasse 1, 5th floor
1010 Vienna, Austria

Email: Policy_Unit@icmpd.org

ICMPD 2021. All rights reserved. Short sections, not to exceed two paragraphs, may be quoted in the original language without explicit permission provided that the source is acknowledged. Opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) alone.