



Concept Note

Second High-level Interparliamentary Conference on Migration and Asylum

Monday, 14th June 2021

- **The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on migration and asylum policies**

Migration is a phenomenon that has always concerned the European continent. Migratory flows, both from outside and within Europe, have redefined and enriched our societies, shaping our present identity.

Over the past few years, we have seen the rise of migratory flows across Europe and beyond, which has been triggered by some of key challenges of our contemporary world: political instability and growing authoritarianism, inequality and extreme poverty, paired and exacerbation of climate change and environmental degradation.

People who decide to migrate and to seek refugee are too often exposed to risks, distress and abuses. Many of them are caught in the trap of human smugglers and embark on perilous journeys. We can see this happening every day at the European's shores.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only added another element of complexity to an already highly problematic scenario.

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the worst global crisis since the end of World War II. It has caused deep disruptions at the social, economic and political levels in all societies around the world. The outbreak of the pandemic can be seen as a product of the contradictions of our globalised world. Indeed, the COVID-19 crisis is considered by many as a demonstration of the impact of biodiversity loss on human health. At the same time, the pandemic has once more confronted ourselves with our fragility and interconnectedness.

The pandemic has not only affected people's health, but namely work, income and education, disproportionately impacting on the most socio-economically vulnerable populations, including migrants and refugees. Away from Europe and the US, the crisis has indeed hit the developing countries very hard, whether in South Asia, Africa or Latin America. This poses enormous risks for the future of the world in terms of inequality and social cohesion but also for peace and security.

COVID-19 pandemic is also having profound impacts on migration patterns at local and global level, and it is deemed to have a multiplier effect on future displacements. The pandemic has cut off mobility pathways, stranded migrants, destroyed jobs and income, reduced remittances and pushed millions of migrants and vulnerable populations into poverty.

The EU should also lead efforts of the international community in supporting low- and middle-income countries, especially those in the European neighbourhood, in their economic recovery.

Against this background, this thematic session of the High-level Interparliamentary Conference aims to address the following topics:

- The impact of the pandemic on the economic and political stability of countries of origins and transit;
- An EU Strategy for Africa- Developing the comprehensive Strategy with Africa¹; the role of other international actors such as Russia and China.
- Engaging with states on the main migratory routes- the role of the Rabat, Khartoum processes and the regional African organisations;
- Supporting countries of origin and transit in capacity building in terms of law enforcement frameworks and operational capacity; impact of weak governance on effectiveness in achieving partnerships on migration.
- Reinforcing partner countries' capabilities on migration governance, i.e. the impact on returns

- **The External dimension of migration and asylum policies**

We live in a world where interdependence is becoming more and more conflictual, in particular with the growing strategic rivalry between the US and China. We also see a broader trend towards competition between countries and societal systems, especially with some of our neighbors such as Russia and Turkey who seem to want to return to a logic of empires, as HR/VP Borrell has remarked.

Our citizens feel they live in an increasingly dangerous and unpredictable world. We need to reassure them that we can provide European answers. It is no secret that migration has become a key subject in the external relations of the EU and assumed a more prominent place in the foreign policy agendas.

The importance of an external dimension is underlined in the Pact on Migration and Asylum proposed by the European Commission that proposes to follow a comprehensive approach. This comprehensive approach lies on the principle of *"mutually beneficial and tailor made partnerships with key third countries of origin and transit"*.

The reinforcement of the migration aspect in the external relations, improving cooperation and partnerships with origin and transit countries, starts to be considered as crucial.

We need to conceive the external dimension of migration and asylum policies as a part of our foreign policy, not just as a tool to enforce returns. We also need to move away from internal solutions based solely on a law enforcement approach, and address the complexity of the migration phenomena, including with a view to the evolution of our EU labour markets and demographic trends. In addition, the external dimension needs to be embedded with the internal dimension in a holistic and comprehensive approach to asylum and migration management in the EU.

¹ Joint Communication "Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa", JOIN(2020) 4 final of 9 March 2020.

Against this background, this thematic session of the High-level Interparliamentary Conference aims to address the following topics:

- Building mutually beneficial and tailor made partnerships with key third countries of origin and transit in view of achieving a comprehensive EU approach on migration and asylum management, including the promotion of legal pathways for migration to the EU, the integration of migrants and tackling human trafficking;
- Supporting the establishment of a holistic and comprehensive approach to asylum and migration management in the EU;
- The external dimension of migration and asylum policies as a part of EU foreign policy; fostering strategic cooperation in policy areas of mutual interest and ensuring a coherent, sustainable and effective cooperation in different fields;
- Supporting migration management and asylum systems in partner countries; reinforcing partner countries' capabilities on migration governance, i.e. the impact on returns;
- Human rights and refugee protection standards in the centre of partnerships with third countries.