

Which legal migration policy for the EU?

Breakfast Policy Briefing – 21 June 2011

Summary

Immigration is high on the agenda at EU and national level, impacting on many policy areas, Cecilia Malmström, European Commissioner for Home Affairs, told an EPC Policy Briefing. The Commissioner concentrated her remarks on three main areas with respect to her vision on EU legal migration policy: labour shortages, relationships with the Southern Mediterranean, and the integration of migrants. The Commission is preparing a Green Paper on labour shortages to launch a dialogue about labour market needs; it intends to begin a dialogue with Southern Mediterranean countries on legal migration initiatives; and by the summer will produce a Communication on integration. Meanwhile, strong political leadership is needed to challenge xenophobic tendencies in some Member States and address public concerns about migration.

Full Report

Immigration is high on the agenda at the EU and national level, **Cecilia Malmström**, European Commissioner for Home Affairs, told an EPC Policy Briefing. Migration is relevant to many policy areas, which is why it is debated from so many different angles. It has always had an impact in economics, culture, cohesion and development of society. It affects the identity and cultural dimension of the EU in many ways. The Commissioner concentrated her speech on three main areas with respect to her vision on EU legal migration policy: labour shortages, relationships with the Southern Mediterranean, and the integration of migrants.

Labour shortages

The EU is facing a structural demographic problem. Last year, for the first time, there were more deaths than births. The EU population will start falling from 2014, and the workforce is projected to shrink by 50 million over the next 50 years. Recent reports indicate the EU economy could be short of up to 700,000 IT workers by 2015 and 1 to 2 million health care workers by 2020. This represents 15% of the health care workers needed in the EU. Even with the best employment policies, the EU will not be able to find this labour force in the EU.

To be economically competitive, the EU needs a well-managed migration policy, which includes legal immigration from outside. It is difficult to explain this at a time of high unemployment and extreme economic difficulties in many countries. But the reality is that many business sectors have difficulty finding skilled people, which is why the EU needs to bring people in to fill certain jobs. It needs to target people with the education and skills that the EU needs. This is outlined in the EU 2020 strategy - labour migration is mentioned as one of the key areas to be addressed in order to increase European growth and competitiveness. One of the flagship initiatives underlines the role of migration as a key factor in meeting the ambitions of the EU to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy.

While there is a need to discuss and advance this at the EU level, the priorities and numbers of migrants required will vary between Member States, who are not all in the same situation and who do not all share the same past or migration culture. All aspects of migration policy cannot be dealt with at EU level, but it is important to have a common

framework setting out some basic rules to be applied and conditions to be met. The European Commission has tabled certain initiatives in this regard. For instance, negotiations are advanced between the Council and the European Parliament on creating a combined work and residence permit for migrants (the Single Permit Directive), which would have the effect of simplifying administrative formalities. The Commission is also advancing on proposals for directives on intra-corporate transferees, and seasonal workers.

The Commission is preparing a Green Paper on labour shortages, which will be published in 2012. Its aim will be to launch a dialogue about labour market needs, and improving labour matching and better skills recognition between EU countries and third countries. This might lead to new initiatives and proposals, but the most important thing is to start a structured dialogue. Some of the challenges are already known: need for better forecasting of labour skills shortages; enhancing the recognition of qualifications from outside the EU; improving information on job opportunities; and making sure the EU is an attractive labour market.

Southern Mediterranean

The Commission has adopted a number of Communications to contribute to the discussion on how the EU should address current developments in the Southern Mediterranean. The events that have taken place are fantastic - young people asking for democracy, fundamental rights, freedom and the rule of law. There has been a need for a humanitarian response, particularly in a context where 1 million people have fled Libya. The EU immediate response has been to mobilise funds to help with the humanitarian emergency (€130 million) and repatriation of third country nationals (€70 million). There is also a need to talk about the long-term relationship in terms of legal migration to the EU and mobility between the two countries. Such a dialogue should be part of a comprehensive and balanced approach is needed to better manage migration flows.

It is hoped that the European Council will give the Commission a full mandate to negotiate with these countries on all aspects of migration and associated security aspects in a mobility partnership. The full dialogue will include fighting trafficking, readmission, return policy, and facilitating legal mobility and migration, using the full potential of the current visa code and other policies.

Integration

Well managed migration depends on well managed integration. Last year, the European Council underlined that the employment rate should reach 75% of men and women aged 20-64, including better integration of migrants. EU policies must ensure a fair treatment of third country nationals and grant rights and obligations comparable to those of EU citizens. Many highly qualified migrants work in low skilled jobs, and there are public concerns about lack of integration, high unemployment, bad health, lower education, and segregated areas where there are some social problems. These issues need to be addressed by better integration. Individuals and society can benefit from migrants if they are allowed to participate and play a role. This is a key challenge, in which schools play an important role.

The EU cannot integrate migrants - they are best integrated by the local community in which they live - but the EU can support local communities. This varies with each community, which is why it is important to work together, for example with the Committee of the Regions, to share good and bad practice. The Lisbon Treaty provides the possibility to make proposals on integration, and the Commission by the summer will produce a Communication on integration, highlighting indicators and methods that work, concentrating on language skills and access to labour markets. Integration is a two-way process requiring strong commitment from both sides of civil society and demanding the active participation of migrants.

There is also a need to address growing tendencies of discrimination and xenophobia. In many countries populist parties use migrants as a scapegoat. The EU has to oppose these tendencies - there is need for strong political leadership to challenge the views and address the concerns. This includes admitting that integration has in many aspects failed, when we consider differences of levels of unemployment, health

problems and education attainment between native and immigrant communities. It is important, however, not to give into the rhetoric.

In partnership with all the Member States, success stories need to be shown as well as the economic, social and cultural benefits of migrants. Migration offers great possibilities for the EU, not without challenges, but the contribution of migrants to Europe has been magnificent and should not be disregarded.

Discussion

Asked how Member States can be persuaded to be more forthcoming on legal migration, Cecilia Malmström said that it is difficult as more Member States are talking about protecting borders rather than opening them. This can only be changed by argument, and by political leaders realising that this is a historic opportunity. If the EU does not, for instance, take this chance to liaise and build a new and true partnership with its neighbours in the South, it might regret it for decades. There is a need to fight irregular migration, and to make sure that people have job possibilities and a future in their own country. The EU needs to engage with countries in an equal way, not dictating conditions, but negotiating.

Asked about integration successes, she said that there are good examples in Member States where regions have effectively identified migrant needs and skills. People coming want to contribute and build a new life - sometimes they have never been asked how they can contribute. In Sweden, for example, an urgent need of 150 doctors in the Western region gave rise to a search amongst migrants. The result was the discovery of 450 educated doctors from different countries, many of whom had been working in semi-skilled or unskilled employment. The region identified training needs to make these professionals effective in the local system.

Referring to a comment about the Eastern Partnership, she said it was extremely important. There are historical links and commitments with Eastern neighbourhood countries and the Commission will work with the incoming Polish Presidency on how mobility can be improved. There is no contradiction between East and South, despite the focus on North Africa because of the democratic wave. EU Member States have diverse interests and this provides a balance. When it comes to asylum and migration the majority of people come to the EU from the east.

Challenged about the importance of migration and the needless fear of an ageing European population given the untapped reserves in the EU workforce, the Commissioner responded that there is a need to make more use of the underused skills in the EU population, including working longer and making sure people stay healthy, but still the EU will need more people. This will be different for each Member State - some are in desperate need already, and others will have needs later. The EU is not trying to set up a model, simply to facilitate labour migration and keep it on the agenda. If the EU wants to sustain its competitiveness and its social models it needs more people.

The EU needs to do more to bridge the gap between internal and external policies - investing in trade, economic investment, development, political cooperation, and support for democracy - and linking these more coherently with migration than has been done in the past. The private sector can help by identifying needs, being outspoken about its needs and skill shortages, and how we can facilitate people coming to Europe.

Responding to a comment about Australia's approach to migration, she said that Australia was a model to learn from. She agreed the EU needs to be better in qualification and skills recognition, and would like to see a worldwide standard for skills.

Asked how the Commission was addressing the issue of family reunification, Commissioner Malmström said it was a very important factor for integration and for humanitarian reasons. The Commission would be publishing a green paper on this subject by the end of the year to identify problems, shortcomings, and enhance debate.