

Strait is the gate

New priorities for European immigration policy

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Questions and answers for media

What is the background to this policy brief?

Migratory pressure on the EU is rising, some member states with a significant stock of immigrants are facing major integration challenges, and the EU is struggling to attract and retain top talent in the global competition for high-skilled workers. The progress in European immigration policy has been patchy to date. Against this background, the incoming French Presidency has placed immigration high on its agenda. This policy brief discusses what the EU's priorities for a common immigration policy should be.

Which should be the priorities for the EU's common immigration policy?

High Skilled immigration – Blanket harmonisation of legal immigration or integration policies should not be regarded as an urgent priority at EU level. However, there is one major exception - high-skilled immigration - where preferences among member states are generally well aligned and where a common European solution could make Europe much more attractive in the global competition for talent.

Irregular migration – Irregular migration has large spill-over effects since the irregular migrants move freely within the Schengen area. For example, an estimated 50 percent of irregular Ukrainian migrants in Portugal originally entered the EU with a Schengen visa issued by the Austrian or German embassies. The argument for EU coordination of irregular migration is further strengthened by the expectation that immigration pressures are set to increase in the coming years.

Asylum - EU policies to coordinate asylum policies have been successful at reducing the number of asylum application. However, this raises the question to what extent Europe still does justice to its ambition to provide shelter to people who are in need of protection. Perhaps the time has come to acknowledge that asylum policy which upholds European values is a European public good that should to a larger extent be provided through joint financing so that the burden of generous countries like Sweden is shared better within the EU.

What policy recommendations are given in the policy brief?

The main conclusions and policy recommendations identified in this paper are as follows:

- **High-skilled migration:** For the EU to participate successfully in the global competition for talent, the Blue Card draft directive needs to be strengthened. In particular, the Blue Card needs to become more readily transferable so that it genuinely offers access to the entire EU



labour market. At the same time, concerns about brain drain should be taken seriously, not least by offering developing countries an opt-out clause.

- Irregular migration: The EU agenda on irregular migration must be balanced to succeed. The currently envisaged efforts to reduce irregular migration through tighter controls will merely slow the inflow of irregular migrants but will not make the problem of irregular migration disappear. It is proposed that tighter controls should be combined with better and common humanitarian standards and an agreement on continuous 'earned regularisation' as an alternative to denial-induced sporadic mass regularisations.
- Asylum: Not least because of past coordination efforts, asylum applications in Europe have dropped considerably in recent years while wars and political persecution continue to make people flee their home countries on a large scale. In order for Europe to help these refugees more effectively, a 'new Nansen' scheme offering 25,000 humanitarian immigration slots per year is proposed, the funding and allocation of which are to be organised at European level.