



Vision Europe Summit

Conference Declaration

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BUILDING COMMON GROUND: Towards strategic migration and refugee policies in Europe



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Towards strategic migration and refugee policies in Europe

The record numbers of refugees arriving in Europe in 2015 has put pressure on policymakers to devise effective policies that address both the plight of refugees and the concerns of EU citizens. The crisis has exacerbated divisions and tensions within and between EU member states and revealed how unprepared the EU was to deal with such an influx.

Crises, however, can be constructive, if they create the conditions for essential reforms. As Europe now has some breathing space in managing the refugee flows, there is an opportunity to focus on strategy development, which cannot be missed. There is also an opportunity for dialogue around European values, identity and vision that can help build common ground for the future.

For almost a decade, the EU has found itself consumed by a series of political and economic crises. The EU's inability to manage them effectively has created tensions between member states and reduced citizens' trust in the Union's capacity to resolve them. The migration and refugee crisis should not be seen as simply another challenge in an ongoing European political crisis. Rather, it is a wake-up call for European leaders and could break the union or the Schengen area if mismanaged. If managed effectively, it could help lay the ground work for a more united Europe.

Despite the volume of recent flows, member states still have an opportunity to develop effective policies and build resilient systems for an unpredictable future. Migration will remain a reality in an unequal, globalised world plagued by violent conflict and climate change. Human mobility is also a part of the solution to many global problems.

It was the EU's unpreparedness and reliance on mainly national responses to this international challenge that aggravated the crisis. The EU urgently needs to develop a common, effective, pro-active and fair refugee policy.

To benefit from migration, the creation of capacities to manage migration, as well as successful societal integration of immigrants is indispensable. With proactive and evidence-based approaches, political will, the support of civil society, and strong leadership Europe can not only manage migration but also benefit from it. Given the drivers of global mobility, Europe must expect and plan for flows in the future. Policy makers need to take stock of the successful and the unsuccessful experiences accumulated in some countries and help the best ideas to scale up.

We, the conveners of the Vision Europe Summit, call for a new approach in Europe, and action at all levels: global, European, national and local. Our future strategies and responses need to be comprehensive, coherent and opportunity-driven. We also need to continue dialogue on our European values of solidarity, equality, freedom, democracy and justice, and how our policies fit with them. European countries have diverse cultures and histories, but should aim to be united by a shared understanding of human dignity.



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Strategic directions:

A. Create political will to develop a forward-looking EU strategy on migration.

The EU is divided over the appropriate collective response to the migration and refugee crisis, triggering disagreements and divisions both within and between member states.

In preparing for the future, member states need to reconcile their national interests and find common ground to work together at the EU level, but first and foremost, they need to develop reflective capacities and common structures for evidence-based dialogue, rebuilding trust and developing political will. This requires setting realistic goals, as well as courage from Europe's leaders.

B. Develop coherent and fair mechanisms for better managing migration flows.

To manage migration sustainably, EU responses should be based on international law. Policies should prioritise early intervention and investment. They should be based on fairness to all parties involved - migrants and refugees, host communities and origin, transit, and destination countries.

In managing migration flows, it is important to draw a distinction between economic migrants and refugees fleeing war or persecution. Due to climate change and other global challenges, Europe may increasingly have to deal with those who are displaced but do not qualify for refugee status.

In an integrated area without border controls, joint decisions on the protection of the external borders of Europe are fundamental. It has to go hand in hand with a broader vision of development, e.g. proactive support to countries of origin, coherent and sustainable management of the whole migration chain, and sharing responsibilities between EU countries.

C. Promote work and education focused integration that strengthens social belonging.

The long-term success of migration policies is measured by how well those who are permitted to stay in our societies and their descendants are integrated and able to contribute to society.

Migrants who are of a relatively young age may inject vital human capital into ageing populations and contribute to economic growth. But one should not underestimate the importance of cultural barriers for integration and should proactively tackle them.

We emphasize an opportunity-based mind-set where work-based integration efforts, supported by measures strengthening social belonging, are viewed as social investments that can produce economic benefits, and where regular impact assessments are used to ensure social and economic return on investment.

D. Mobilise the whole of society to promote inclusivity.

Ethnic, cultural and religious diversity has been at the heart of most European societies, yet myths of national homogeneity have caused violent conflicts throughout history. Recently, anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiment has increased, and migrant and ethnic minority voices remain under-represented in society.

European societies must learn to adjust to much greater ethnic and cultural diversity in order to release their creative and economic potential. It is crucial to prevent social exclusion, to encourage civic engagement in responding to public anxieties and to create positive and fact-based narratives for society. The foundation for diverse societies needs to be our constitutional values.



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Policy recommendations:

A1. Develop reflective capacities in the EU and strengthen dialogue between and within member states. In order to build common ground for the future, an evidence-based dialogue on migration needs to be developed among member states and societies at large. Such dialogue should be based on active anticipation and monitoring of migration flows and detailed measurement of their consequences. For that purpose, data on all relevant areas of migration need to be harmonized. The EU and its member states should also make full use of available knowledge and strengthen analytic capacity in the source and transit countries of migration.

A2. Consolidate joint actions to build success stories. Successful co-operation at the EU level increases trust in further joint action. However, joint EU actions have been limited so far, and true success stories are few. The operations of the European Border and Coast Guard, for example, need to be consolidated – not only from the perspective of effective border control, but also that of sustainable mobility management that respects human rights and international law. In creating a positive view on the future, successful asylum management and integration efforts in member countries deserve better recognition.

A3. Deliver on agreements to build trust. A long-term strategy is impossible without trust. The implementation of joint decisions has sometimes been poor, undermining trust in common decisions. It is essential to build trust in the ability and political will of the EU and its member states to address the migration and refugee situation through effective operationalization of joint decisions, such as the adoption and implementation of the relocation mechanism and the deployment of national officials in the agreed 'hotspots' of Italy and Greece.

B1. Improve stability and opportunity in the regions of origin. The root causes of migration should be vigorously tackled in order to create opportunities for a better future for those living in crisis-torn regions. EU and member states need to engage and play a strong role in conflict resolution together with coherent and sustainable foreign, economic, trade and development policies. Further cooperation and financial support is required for states, host communities and civil society organizations near conflict zones which are hosting large numbers of refugees. Integrating and legalizing the status of refugees in nearby or transit countries should also be supported.

B2. Create safe passages and improve asylum processes. Preventing risky journeys and enabling refugees to return home when the situation improves requires increased resettlement places with improved living conditions and education opportunities, and concerted efforts to tackle human traffickers. Humanitarian visas and more legal pathways to Europe are needed. Those who are seeking or have protection but are willing to return later should be aided in return and reintegration. Asylum processes need to avoid unproductive and frustrating waiting times, without compromising the quality of eligibility assessment.

B3. Share responsibilities across the EU. The EU should aim at a fairer system of relocation and distribute a much larger number of refugees across the Union. Member states not willing to host refugees themselves could choose to make a financial contribution to a Migration Solidarity Fund which should be created to manage this compensatory system. This should also take into account the particular costs of supporting vulnerable groups, as well as capacity building needs in countries with less experience in integration.



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C1. Apply a social investment perspective to integration. Integration efforts should not be viewed simply as a cost to be borne but an investment to be made. Well-designed integration policies can promote sustainable growth and be a competitive asset. This 'social investment' approach, combined with the principle of fairness, should guide integration efforts. For investments to succeed, clear priorities and goals for integration are needed, as well as high-quality evidence on progress across different policy areas and timescales. A wider constituency of social partners can support innovation, collective problem-solving and utilize private capital for integration efforts.

C2. Encourage and enable early employment and education. "Fast track" mechanisms - where the existing skills and talents are recognized and developed early - are essential in successful integration. Employment can be supported by developing part-time and flexible work, distance learning opportunities, and addressing the challenges that 'would-be' entrepreneurs face. Employment opportunities need to go beyond corporate social responsibility and reflect the long-term economic interests of companies. Integrated language and professional training should be made available. Educational programs at all levels are needed to fill gaps in skills and knowledge, to support integration and enable returning refugees to support the reconstruction of their states of origin.

C3. Strengthen social belonging. All refugees and migrants, whether they can or cannot work, should be supported to become full and active members of their new societies. Opportunities for education and voluntary activities are needed, and work-focused integration policies should further social integration and vice versa. The distribution of refugees among municipalities in ways that take into account education, housing and employment opportunities support integration and help create social belonging. Early attention should

be paid to those who are most vulnerable, such as women, children, unaccompanied minors and those suffering from severe trauma.

D1. Increase intercultural dialogue and respect. Facilitating interaction between migrants and receiving communities can help counteract prejudice and the isolation of migrant communities. European countries and communities should aim to prevent the creation of 'parallel societies'. Bridges need to be built between communities to avoid the exclusion or potential radicalization of next-generation migrants. Respect for human rights, democratic values and cultural norms have proven to be success factors for integration of migrants.

D2. Promote open, evidence-based dialogue. The public debate on migration in many European countries has become polarized. Too often immigration has been wrongly associated with threats. At the same time, it is important to recognize the sometimes disruptive effects of immigration on host societies. Without an open, evidence-based dialogue on immigration, a political consensus to move forward will not be possible. Such a dialogue can help bust myths and misconceptions as well as understand and address the concerns of local populations. The economic aspects and opportunities of migration, given the demographic pressures facing Europe's ageing societies, are important to this dialogue.

D3. Support bottom-up approaches. Many cities and civil society organizations across Europe have developed pragmatic, proactive and constructive solutions for welcoming and integrating migrants, which usefully complement the policies of national governments. It is therefore crucial to support local and grassroots initiatives, whilst allowing civil society organizations to maintain their independence, as integration is ultimately a local phenomenon.



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This conference declaration was signed on 22 November 2016 at the occasion of the second annual Vision Europe Summit in Lisbon. The signatories are leaders from the eight think tanks and foundations convening the Vision Europe Summit.

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Vision Europe consortium

Vision Europe is a consortium of think tanks and foundations collaborating to address some of the most pressing public policy challenges facing Europe. Through research, publications and an annual summit, we aim to be a forum for debate and a source of recommendations to improve evidence-informed policy making at both a national and EU level and to foster as appropriate European integration.

In 2016 we jointly worked on the topic “Improving the responses to the migration and refugee crisis in Europe”. Experts from our organisations and networks came together in working groups on different aspects of the topic. The outputs are published in three background papers, three policy papers and a survey report. The suggestions for reforms made in this publication have been discussed with high-level stakeholders from politics, business, civil society and academia at the occasion of the second annual Vision Europe Summit in Lisbon in November 2016.

Vision Europe

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