

Office of the SRSG for International Migration  
United Nations  
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New York, N.Y. 10017

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Dear Madame Louise Arbour,

Following an exchange with Jonathan Prentice, Andrea Milan and Angelo Martelli, I am pleased to attach a note that the Alliance of Leading Universities on Migration (ALUM) prepared at the invitation of the Italian G7 Sherpa Unit. We were asked to provide research-informed policy recommendations on three particular dimensions of human mobility, ahead of the G 7 Taormina Summit at end-May 2017.

The paper has two fundamental recommendations from ALUM researchers: (1) direct collaboration and coordination between academia, international institutions, and G7 policy makers could support more effective, evidence-based policies and better-tailored, more policy-relevant research; and (2) to fully understand human mobility, it is necessary to incorporate perspectives from countries of origin, transit, and destination.

We, the ALUM network, very much hope to establish a partnership between the Office of the SRSG for International Migration at the UN and ALUM on human mobility, including forced displacement and migration. I firmly believe that research should directly support policy development and that our collaboration would have the promise of strengthening evidence-based policy making in the future.

I look forward to hearing from you. Please accept by my sincere best wishes for the success of the forthcoming UN Secretary-General's report on the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.

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## Summary of Proceedings: Siracusa II Conference on Migration/Human Mobility

As global displacement has risen to levels not seen since the end of the Second World War, attention to human mobility issues among academics, international institutions and policy-makers/politicians has increased markedly. However, for the most part, this work is taking place in parallel, with little direct dialogue among these players. This can lead to unnecessary delays and overall suboptimal outcomes. To the extent academic work is informing policy, it is often only indirectly and with a significant time lag. Stronger direct linkages between G7 policy makers, international institutions and leading universities could help to ensure that cutting edge academic research supports policy development in this pressing area.

The Siracusa II Conference highlighted the promise of a new partnership between the Alliance of Leading Universities on Migration (ALUM) and G7 policy-makers that could harness increased academic focus on human mobility to inform policy. ALUM ([www.alum.global](http://www.alum.global)) is a policy-focused network of universities on migration. Started with eight universities across Europe at the end of 2015, it was expanded in 2016 to include several key universities from the Middle East and North Africa, boosting academic knowledge across the three regions. ALUM currently has 16 members, and its expansion is underway into Canada and the US.

Linking academic research directly to pressing G7 policy questions would help to bridge the gap between evidence and policy, supporting more effective, better targeted and better communicated policy solutions. In addition to gathering leading academic voices and collating credible policy recommendations, ALUM would contribute essential perspectives from outside of the G7, including voices from leading thinkers from countries of origin, transit, and first asylum.

Under Italy's Presidency of the G7 in 2017, the first major step has been made toward such a new partnership on human mobility. ALUM's second conference in Siracusa at the end of April discussed and summarized evidence in three main areas of particular interest to the current G7 presidency: (i) investing in countries of origin, transit and destination; (ii) migration's vulnerable groups; and (iii) net contribution of migrants in key areas of society. The representative of the G7 Italian Sherpa participated in the discussion, along with a special adviser from the Italian Ministry of Justice.

Siracusa II's outcomes and preliminary recommendations are described below. These would be best treated as the beginning of a conversation. Participants from both government and academic backgrounds agreed on the potential of ALUM to support and inform work on migration and human mobility through the transition to the Canadian G7 Presidency and

beyond. If given an explicit mandate from the G7, ALUM could work with international organizations (including the International Financial Institutions and UN) and in dialogue with policy makers to further refine and test the initial policy recommendations laid out below and help with their communication and outreach. Continued partnership and feedback could serve as a valuable resource for both policy makers and academics, helping governments to refine policy positions and academics to better tailor research to ensure policy relevance.

## 1. Investing in countries of origin, transit and destination

**Investing to reduce forced displacement and improve human mobility outcomes is a multidimensional policy challenge.** An effective investment strategy will need to be multi-pronged, targeting the root causes of displacement as well as its impact on displaced persons and host communities. The recent focus on linking humanitarian and development aid with the involvement of lead academics and IFIs is welcome, though more evidence is needed on how to make it work sustainably and without negative impacts – real or perceived – on hosting local communities.

Siracusa II spanned **three major goals** of investment in countries of origin and transit, each with distinct policy implications: (1) improving outcomes for refugees, migrants, and their host communities in frontline states; (2) assisting internally displaced persons (IDPs); and (3) addressing the root causes of forced displacement and economic migration, with a number of specific initial policy recommendations:

- **Recognize that that the real “crisis” is in frontline states, where high numbers and the associated economic burden threatens already fragile social cohesion.** Globally as much as 85% of forced migrants remain in the global South. Refugee populations in Lebanon and Jordan are straining already weak public services and jeopardizing delicate political balances. Social cohesion is becoming an issue even in host communities where integration has been relatively successful (for example, the Kurdish Region of Iraq).
- **Overhaul “deals” and enhance compacts.** Challenges with both the design and implementation of current deals and compacts between G7 members and states hosting large numbers of refugees, especially the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, are mounting. Specific challenges include political sustainability, design and effectiveness of policy conditionality, failure to deliver promised assistance, and the relatively small scale of assistance to frontline states relative to the costs of refugee support.
- **Support government policies that create employment and livelihood opportunities for refugees.** Empirical and anecdotal evidence suggests that government policies matter. Policies that create opportunities for refugees can improve their economic contribution to host communities. Evidence points to the importance of empowering local governments and municipalities, which know local needs and opportunities best.
- **Channel investment in countries of origin, transit and destination to align with emerging academic evidence on best practices.** In particular,
  - Literature points to the effectiveness of increasing access to tertiary education for refugees, including helping refugees prepare to support eventual peacebuilding and repatriation processes in their countries of origin.

- Evidence also points to significant potential returns on directing investments towards small, local organizations, who may be best placed to serve the needs of forcibly displaced people and migrants and their host communities (“going small in a bigger way”).
  - Laying the groundwork for property restitution processes for refugees - and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) - can also help ensure that displaced persons’ housing, land and property concerns are effectively addressed in the event of negotiated resolutions to the conflicts fueling displacement, as evidence from Colombia demonstrates.
- **Harness the private sector to improve the effectiveness of investments to support refugees, migrants and host communities.** Any future G7-ALUM work plan should include continued efforts to link academics, the private sector, and policy makers. Four main recommendations can be offered in this regard:
    - Focus on enabling local business to engage refugees by removing barriers that prevent private sector development.
    - Facilitate early access to the labor market. Meanwhile, attention needs to be paid to ensuring basic labor laws, including ban on child labor.
    - Help to link global business with local business in support of refugees. To date global and local businesses operate in parallel, missing out on synergies and exchange of know-how.
    - Specific measures could accelerate cross-fertilization of ideas and cooperation (for example, “dual business registration” or dedicated knowledge sharing between G7 and migration-impacted countries in the form of “global public places”).
- **Increase attention and support for IDPs.** The majority of those who flee in most conflicts migrates internally first, seeking refuge externally only after coping mechanisms are exhausted. Consequently, the overwhelming majority of forcibly displaced persons worldwide are IDPs. However, IDPs attract little policy attention relative to refugees that move across borders and significant inequalities persist in terms of access to protection and assistance and support relative to cross-border refugees. In particular, IDPs lack a clear, effective advocate in the international system. As a concrete contribution to addressing IDPs’ needs, G7 states could support the prompt creation of a new position within the UN, a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on IDPs.
- **Continue G7 focus on resolving major violent conflicts.** The majority of forced displacement globally has been caused by just 10 long-lasting conflicts, underscoring the ongoing importance of G7 efforts to support political solutions to major conflicts such as Syria and Afghanistan.
- **Invest in more targeted research and better data to support evidence-based policy development.** Academic research can help to better tailor investments in countries of origin/return, transit and destination, to desired policy outcomes. For example, recent G7 and EU efforts have focused on integrating migrants into host communities in frontline states, via deals that trade policy conditionality for assistance and other commitments. But too little is known about how these policies affect the decision-making of refugees and migrants. Similarly, more evidence is needed to determine how factors such as wait times,

housing, labor market access, and residency status, affect outcomes for migrants and asylum seekers. Finally, we lack rigorous evidence on the effectiveness of investments in peace enhancing initiatives, including conflict prevention, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), and peacekeeping. ALUM researchers are partnering to investigate these questions with a view to informing smarter and more effective future policy design.

## 2. Protection of children, unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups

Migration, particularly under forced circumstances, is often a risky journey, and it is even more dangerous for vulnerable groups such as women and children. Unaccompanied minors are the most exposed to the risk of being targeted by organized crime. Trafficking in human beings is a serious crime, often with a gender dimension. Enhancing law enforcement cooperation on protection of vulnerable groups has to be a focus of the joint multi-dimensional international policy attention and action.

International law provides certain rules on the treatment of children involved in migration. International legal obligations deriving from the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 apply to all sectors of government. International jurisprudence (e.g. the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights) requires states not to return a child to a country where there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of irreparable harm. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights released in 2014 its Advisory Opinion on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration. Through this Opinion, the IACHR developed a set of regional human rights standards applicable to child migrants. The European Union has been implementing the EU Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors, which focuses on three types of actions: prevention of unsafe migration and trafficking of children; protection of unaccompanied minors in the host state, and finding durable solutions based on the individual assessment of the best interests of the child.

Further policy action could focus on the following interrelated areas:

- **Developing and adopting best practice for assisting children and especially unaccompanied minors.** Italy's new law offers a good example of unaccompanied minor protection. Protecting all unaccompanied minors, regardless of their migratory status, along with health care assistance and education is key to prevent any form of exploitation. The so-called *non-refoulement* obligations should be fully respected. Best practice can provide the basis of a comprehensive and victim-centered approach and related legal and policy framework in line with the "4P approach" (Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, Partnership). For unaccompanied minors, the crucial elements of protection include: the identification of an unaccompanied child upon arrival; first contact services that include a psychologist and interpreter and work independently from the police; prompt registration of the child in a national register in accordance with the law on protection of personal data; speedy attribution of personal identity documentation; and appointment of a legal tutor.
- **Developing and adopting best practices with respect to women migrants and gender elements of migration.** As the number of asylum seekers has risen in the EU, the percentage of female applicants has fluctuated between 28% in 2008 to 34% in 2012 back to 28% in 2015. Greater policy focus on the needs of women migrants as well as gender and

sexual violence issues is needed during both during transit and over the longer-term integration process. Special attention is needed for female unaccompanied minors.

- During transit, best practices include implementing more rapid identification of women with special needs; training professionals to deal with gender and sexual violence; and providing appropriate accommodation and related facilities.
- Over the longer term, it is crucial to offer targeted integration measures designed for women, including language, job creation, employment training and childcare.
- **Materially improving statistical data on the global movement of children, particularly unaccompanied minors, and on gender.** This is a major impediment to nuanced research and subsequent policy formulation and implementation of child-sensitive and gendered migration policies.

### 3. Net contribution of migrants and communication strategy

**Academic evidence shows that migrants' contributions to the development of the countries that host them are not negative and can be clearly positive in socio-economic areas with appropriate policies in place.** This is particularly true in aging societies where labor shortages can reduce growth potential and income, and ultimately pose risks to fiscal sustainability. Yet, the existing positive evidence is little known and/or not communicated to society in a balanced and convincing way, or worse, is distorted in the pursuit of populist objectives. Academics could play an important and credible role in producing and disseminating up-to-date evidence. Ultimately, human mobility is a natural dimension of humanity that needs evidence-informed and balanced understanding by society members.

Siracusa II's main findings drew on the conference discussions as well as key academic contributions in this area:

- **The net economic impact is positive in key economic areas,** though the impact can depend, inter alia, on political integration prospects (easier pathway to employment and/or citizenship fosters investment and employability as studies in Switzerland, US (among others) indicate).
- **Labor market impact is overall neutral, with no convincing evidence of negative impact on wages or employment.** Job dislocation of natives in a given sector typically prompts them to shift to other sectors. Partial studies focusing only on a given sector can thus be misleading, as research on Philippine nurses and integrating ex-Soviet mathematicians in the US following the fall of the Soviet Union demonstrate. In aging societies the positive effects are even clearer.
- **Skilled migration is very positive for innovation.** Evidence shows that skilled migrants in the US produce twice as many patents as natives, due primarily to their concentration in the science and technology sectors. From these sectors positive spillovers occur to the rest of the economy, producing at least some (or more) positive impact overall.
- **Immigrants are also more risk-takers and entrepreneurial** than average natives.
- **Impact on firm productivity depends on the sector.** Immigration into low-tech industry reduces productivity in that sector, while that to high-tech increases it. Israel has provided evidence for both cases.

- **Impact on the housing market is broadly neutral**, though some market segments can be negatively affected, with concentration in the lower end of the market, which may require policy attention.
- **The net fiscal impact of migrants is positive, and even more so if account is taken of the fact that the hosting country did not have to pay for the pre-arrival education of the migrants** (particularly important for skilled migrants). This fact is largely unknown to the wider public, where media and populist policy attention focus on short term fiscal costs only. Evidence suggests that aging societies where the median aging voter is typically less migrant friendly do not internalise this fact and the associated risks to fiscal sustainability over time *because of* limits to migration.
- However, there are **areas where the localized impact may be either mixed or negative**, particularly in **public services**. These require urgent and dedicated policy attention. More study, including cross-country comparisons, is needed to identify best practices to prevent and mitigate these impacts.
  - In healthcare some key studies found of no systemic evidence on longer waiting times or lower quality, in fact there is evidence on *better quality* because of skilled migrant labour and better native health conditions thanks to natives shifting to physically less demanding jobs. However, in case of concentration of large migrant influx into *already poor* health services exacerbates preexisting weak outcomes.
  - In education there is some evidence that an influx of immigrants may lead natives to shift from public to private schools, decreasing support for high quality public schooling. This risks setting in motion a vicious circle of lower funding and lower quality in public schooling.
- **In the area of crime, the experience is mixed.** In the United States, immigrants are less likely to commit crime than their native counterparts and academic studies consistently confirm that immigrants (regardless of legal status) either reduce crime rates or have no impact. In some European countries, however, crime rates of immigrants who do not have legal permission to work appear to be higher than natives. In these countries the crime rates of migrants with permission to work is similar to that of natives, suggesting economic/subsistence reasons for illegal activities.
- There is new evidence on the **strong positive political impact of migrants on the political systems of their country of origin**. When migrants immigrate to a democratic country, over time they tend to “export back” their newly acquired democratic values – this is the so called “**democratic dividend**” through “**political remittance**”. Recent research confirms this phenomenon also with regards to gender: immigration to countries with high female MP participation is associated with higher number of female MPs in the country of origin over time (“gender remittance”). There is also fresh research pointing to the negative impact of discriminatory treatment of migrants on the democratic values of the hosting society.

**Re-balancing public perception is much needed.** Notwithstanding evidence of the positive economic contribution of migrants to their hosting society in most areas, as well as new evidence on the positive “democratic dividend” back in the country of origin over time, several hosting Western countries have recently seen surging anti-immigrant sentiment. Frontier host countries in the Middle East – including Lebanon and Jordan – are also seeing rising populist anti-migration sentiment.

How can the gap between evidence and public perception be reduced? How could a shift toward a more balanced approach to migration perception be engineered in the current largely hostile-populist environment?

**Siracusa II suggested a two-pronged approach to a credible re-balancing of the public narrative around human mobility:**

- **Fresh and innovative communication strategy to drive home the above outlined net positive impact.** A holistic approach that harnesses, in addition to academia, media communication experts, behavioral scientists, and social media private sector participants is needed to address wide-spread perception challenges.
- **Recognising publicly and addressing the few negative outcomes.** Particularly susceptible to populist assault, these areas need more research and fast-track policy action.