

Europe's migrants are here to stay



Migrants keep warm with Red Cross blankets after arriving aboard a coast guard boat at Malaga's harbour on December 7, 2017 | Jorge Guerrero/AFP via Getty Images

It's time to face the truth. We cannot and will never be able to stop migration.

The refugee crisis in Europe may be subsiding, but migration globally will not stop. Today, on International Migrants Day, more than 244 million people are living outside their country of birth. Human mobility will increasingly define the 21st century. If we want to be ready for it, we need to start preparing now.

Migration is an emotional, sensitive and political issue. It has helped determine elections across Europe and the world. But we can no longer talk only about crisis management: Migration is our new reality. The time has come to start thinking, talking and acting about migration in a more comprehensive and long-term way, putting in place policies aimed at promoting integration and inclusion.

Over the last two years, Europe has been primarily engaged in addressing the immediate urgencies of the global migration and refugee crisis — and quite successfully so. Irregular flows have dropped by 63 percent. More than 32,000 refugees have been relocated within Europe. More than 25,000 people in need of protection have been resettled to the Continent, with another 50,000 expected to arrive in the next two years. And thousands of migrants have been helped on the ground in Libya in cooperation with international partners.

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Of course, a lot still remains to be done in the European Union. We need to deliver on our promises to evacuate thousands of migrants from Libya either through resettlement or assisted voluntary return in the coming months. We need to reach a comprehensive and fair asylum reform by June. We must also enhance legal channels for economic migration with a more ambitious Blue Card for highly skilled workers and kick-start targeted labor migration pilot projects in key third

countries.

But we cannot continue taking an ad hoc approach, thinking and acting with only short-term deadlines in mind. When it comes to migration, we're in it for the long haul. This not a problem to solve or a challenge to address. Migration is deeply intertwined with our policies on economics, trade, education and employment — to name just a few.

Unfortunately, the recent discourse on migration — influenced by rising nationalism, populism and xenophobia — has limited our opportunities to put in place smart, forward-looking migration policies, at both the national and European levels.

It is foolish to think that migration will disappear if one adopts harsh language. It is naïve to think that our societies will remain homogenous and migration-free if one erects fences. It is unwise to think that migration will remain on the other side of the Mediterranean, if one only shows solidarity in financial terms.

We must start to be honest with those citizens who are concerned about how we will manage migration. We may not be able to stop migration. But we can be better, smarter and more proactive at managing this phenomenon. However, we cannot achieve this if we don't accept a change in attitude and a change in our narrative.

The EU has granted protection to more than 700,000 people last year. They have found safety in Europe, but we also need to make sure they find a home. This is not only a moral imperative. It is also an economic and social imperative for our aging continent — and one of the biggest challenges for the near future.

There has been some debate about diversity and inclusion recently — including through discussions initiated by POLITICO — but not nearly enough to prompt the changes that our societies need to be ready for the realities of the 21st century.

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Integration and inclusion may sound like luxury discussions when the debate is focused on finding a fair agreement on the reforms of the Dublin regulations, which govern how asylum applications are processed in the EU.

But leaving these long-term considerations out of the conversation would be a

mistake — one that we've made in the past and for which we are still paying the social and economic costs today.

At the end of the day, we all need to be ready to accept migration, mobility and diversity as the new norm and tailor our policies accordingly. The only way to make our asylum and migration policies future-proof, is to collectively change our way of thinking first.

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