



EU-Australia Leadership Forum: Roundtable on Migration and Society

Chair

Emeritus Professor Gillian Triggs FAIA

President of the Australian Human Rights Commission

Rapporteur

Dr Edith Schratzberger-Vecsei (Austria)

President of the European Women's Lobby

Background

One of the first things to be considered is that there is a lack of policy and debate surrounding migration.

The European perspective regarding migration and society strongly considered the plight of women and girls who are the most at-risk group of migrants and refugees. Women and girls are most likely to be sexual assaulted, trafficked and abused. The European Women's Lobby has identified the following important advocacy principles: partnership, prevention, protection, prosecution.

There is also a need for effective transition centres that help to prevent violence against women in crisis, and the EU can give further help to women by granting them legal independent status. All of these initiatives are affected by complex issues in migrant and refugee communities and the rise of far-right extremism and anti-feminist populism. These movements can greatly affect the ability for the EU to effectively address the migrant and refugee crisis, so a taskforce to track the spread of these movements should be implemented.

Another issue within the migrant and refugee crisis is that there is a lack of critical sensibility to understand the broader mobility explosion.

Digital Revolution and Emotional Literacy

There is an important difference between enforced migration and chosen migration. Enforced migration is not a new phenomenon, but has been greatly impacted by the digital revolution. The digital revolution has given migrants the ability to use their devices to travel, to find jobs and to understand immigration laws in the states that they wish to migrate to. This has given rise to a new wave of migration which has been compounded by the digital revolution, giving new opportunities to strengthen the EU-Australia relationship and for detainees to share their stories.





The media talks about migration as an “out-there” phenomenon, but it is “in-here” problem; language can remove human experience and identity. Language also asserts certitude in chaos when there is not certainty. What needs to develop is the “emotional literacy” to handle crisis.

Current Challenges and Attitudes

It is important to remember that Australia is a migrant country and is a mostly successful multicultural society. However, the migration crisis has given rise to an increased rate of Islamophobia and the linkage of refugees and migrants to terrorism. Australia also is dealing with the current use of a 1992 statute that allows for a mandatory detention policy in breach of international law. This policy has allowed for visa cancellations based on character and cases of deplorable conditions of detention centres.

Australia is greatly weakened by the existence and continued use of these policies but the EU has learned from watching the Australian model and has refused to implement it. A further challenge for Australia is the fact that it has few codified freedoms as a common law legal system. This makes it difficult for the immigration detention policy to be challenged in the High Court.

Another component of the migration crisis is the number of people who are trafficked within the Australasian region. There are very few tools to combat these problems. Terrorism is another issue that is affected by the migration crisis and it is necessary to work with the community to combat terrorism.

Political Response

As the number of refugees has skyrocketed, the political system has shifted to focus on management. Migration is a positive element for society, if managed. It is important to realise that migration will stay and increase and domestic policy cannot ignore this. The EU and the UN need to agree on policy regarding migration, refugee and asylum seekers. There will be no solution but there needs to be better answers.

Often a response to events only begins when Western states are affected, compounded by the belief that all refugees want to go to Western states. There is little focus on working in developing states to ensure that people who have fled can go back to their homes. The vast majority of refugees do not want resettlement: they want to go home or as close to home as they can be. The focus is on stopping people from moving rather than addressing what is going on in the state of origin. This has led to an ignorance of the deplorable conditions within detention centres in Southeast Asia.

Systematic global problems require systematic global solutions. But this notion has been affected by the push towards de-globalisation as states think they can control migration by themselves and the rise of populism brings leaders whom refuse to address global challenges. These elements must





be considered as Australia continues to increase its population through integration and tolerance, but how will the EU increase its population?

One of the major solutions lies in empowering women and girls which may be able to change the entire solution since inequality is the root cause of conflict. It is also important to differentiate between refugees and migrants: migrants are typically students or job holders, and are the easiest to integrate as Australia has shown through its extremely large immigration population. Groups of refugees differ in their circumstances and subsequent treatment: for example “regular” refugees, who are accepted by the underfunded resettlement program, and refugees who come to Australia by boat. Australia is hostile to refugees on boats due to the perception of queue jumping and the belief that the state’s stability depends on border security.

Recommendations

In order to address the migrant and refugee crisis, states cannot ignore public opinion and populist movements that espouse migration control. Australia needs to work with the EU on migrant and refugee policy because currently the EU looks to Canada and its policies. There is a need for policies such as: empowerment especially for women, girls and youth; addressing the reality of short-term citizenship; and Australian multiculturalism. “Brain drain” is a huge problem in Australia. Australia also has a responsibility to ensure that young professionals stay in developing states.

Australia's integration program is a model for the EU and its counter-radicalisation network. Australia has valuable lessons on interaction with refugees and migrants for the EU; currently the view of Australia's migration and refugee policy focuses too much on its negative aspects. Australia can also learn from the EU regional approach in working in its region. As a result, the best way to move forward is to focus on integration and the management of settlement in regard to migration and society within the EU and Australia.

