



PRESS RELEASE

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Are 30,000 immigrants all it takes to put an end to freedom of movement in the EU?

Today, EU Justice and Home Affairs Ministers will adopt conclusions on borders, migration and asylum. ENAR, the European Network Against Racism, is deeply concerned by recent proposals to re-introduce internal EU border controls and calls on EU member states not to give in to fear and populism when discussing or deciding on migration-related issues.

The proposal to relax Schengen rules arose in the wake of the Arab Spring and ensuing arrivals of North African immigrants to Europe. France and Denmark have announced they would reinstate border controls, thus jeopardising one of the EU's key achievements: freedom of movement.

“The EU and its member states must realise that the overwhelming majority of people fleeing conflict in Libya and other parts of North Africa have fled to neighbouring countries and only a small number have arrived on Europe's shores”, said Chibo Onyeji, ENAR Chair. “In 2002, the net inflow of international migrants to the EU-15 was 1,260,000¹ and now the EU-27 thinks 30,000 is a crisis situation? This disproportionate reaction confirms recent trends in the migration policy of both the EU and its member states of seeing migration as a threat, and focusing predominantly on border control, control of ‘illegal’ immigration and return policies.”

The migration agenda is driven by negative public perceptions and discourses, yet there is increasing evidence and research pointing to the benefits of migration. For instance, if rich countries were to admit enough migrants from poor countries to expand their own labour forces by a mere 3%, the world would be richer, according to one estimate, by \$356 billion a year. Completely opening borders would add \$39 trillion over 25 years to the global economy.²

Migration is thus an economic solution, in particular in the light of labour shortages in the ageing EU member states. But beyond this, a positive approach to migration should allow for mutual benefits of migrant and host communities and view migrants as individuals with both rights and responsibilities.

“In a society that embraces diversity the interests of the majority and minority are both met by respect for the fundamental human rights of all”, said Onyeji. “It is high time to recognise the daily contribution made by migrants to Europe's economic, social, cultural and political life, as well as the importance of equality and diversity to a vibrant society and economy.”

The European Network Against Racism (ENAR) is a network of more than 700 NGOs working to combat racism in all EU member states. ENAR aims to fight racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and to promote equality of treatment between EU citizens and third country nationals.

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¹ Eurostat figure.

² See “Exceptional People: How Migration Shaped Our World and Will Define Our Future”, Ian Goldin, Geoffrey Cameron and Meera Balarajan, Princeton University Press.