

Meeting of the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration

Sunday, 30 June 2024, 14:30-16:00

(31st OSCE PA Annual Session, Palace of Parliament, Bucharest)

Highlights of the Meeting



The Ad Hoc Committee on Migration met in Bucharest on 30 June on the sidelines of the 31st OSCE PA Annual Session to review implemented activities, in particular the key takeaways of recent field missions to Italy and Türkiye, and to discuss ideas for upcoming activities in 2024/2025. The Committee also heard a presentation by an expert from the OSCE Secretariat.

The meeting was opened by the Chair of the Committee, Dr. Daniela De Ridder (Germany), OSCE PA Vice-President, who officially welcomed three new Members of the Committee, bring its membership to 22 Members from 14 different OSCE participating States.¹ Chair De Ridder thanked the Italian and Turkish delegations, in particular Head of the Italian Delegation Eugenio Zoffili and Turkish delegation Member Kemal Celik as well as their staff, for hosting the recent visits of the Committee. She also thanked the Members for their engagement as well as the OSCE PA International Secretariat for the support provided.



¹ For more information on the mandate and composition of the Committee, please see: <https://www.oscepa.org/en/activities/ad-hoc-committees-and-working-groups/migration>.



OSCE PA President Pia Kauma (Finland) briefly addressed the Committee, highlighting the utmost importance of its work, noting that migration was probably the biggest topic in nearly all the elections being held in the OSCE region, and that this issue was not going to disappear from the political map. We have to be able to address migration from the humanitarian point of view but also from the migration management perspective. President Kauma, who joined the Migration Committee’s visit to Lampedusa in March, noted that the Mediterranean Sea had become a graveyard for those seeking a better life, with over 3,000 deaths over the past year alone, and underlined the necessity and shared responsibility to find solutions. She emphasized the usefulness of field visits in order to better understand first hand the challenges being experienced. The President concluded by thanking the Chair for her proactive approach, as well as Italy and Türkiye for hosting the Committee.

In his presentation “Migration management between politics and policies: The strategic role of evidence and data”, Dr. Guido Tintori, Economic Affairs Officer at the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) in Vienna, presented an overview of how the OSCE-OCEEA is planning to support and contribute to migration management through the implementation of activities in the so-called ‘second dimension’ within the framework of the OSCE’s mandate and commitments. He also kicked off a conversation on how to enhance migration governance by ensuring that it is supported by established knowledge and sound data.

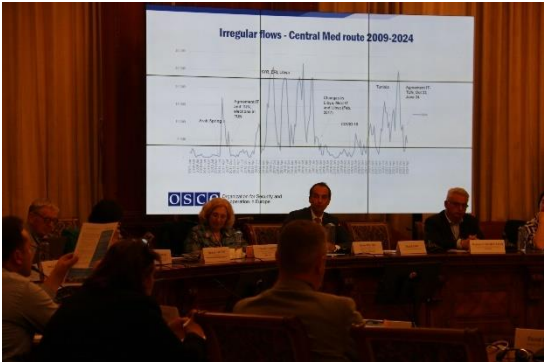


Tintori referred to recent polarized public and political debates – not only in the Western hemisphere – about international migration governance with a focus on border control and security, on the one side, and the advocacy of the expansion of humanitarian channels and recalling the importance of respecting human rights in the management of migration on the other (corresponding to the OSCE’s 1st and 3rd dimensions respectively where excellent work is being done). However, international migration governance is an incredibly complex phenomenon, Tintori underlined, with many actors and factors at play and which interact with each other. He emphasized

the necessity of evidence, knowledge and data in order to cope with this complexity and in order to develop effective policies. This is where the OSCE can help as its mandate in the second dimension is to support OSCE participating States to develop good international migration governance and good labour migration governance.

For example, Tintori pointed to labour demand as well as the presence of a diaspora or migrant networks as the main ‘drivers of migration’ or ‘pull factors’. Hence, demographic change plays an important role. Furthermore, sending states often have different agendas and interests than receiving states, and that many OSCE participating States are primarily countries of emigration.

Tintori presented a few examples of recent advances in the area of data on irregular migration. Underlining that irregular migration is not beneficial for anyone –not for sending states, not for receiving states and not for migrants themselves, he also noted that it is particularly challenging to track as, by definition, there is not much official data. Nevertheless, there has been progress in estimates of irregular migration stocks in many countries thanks to statistical methodologies which can provide ballpark numbers. New data sources such as Facebook, Google, as well as information from hospitals, schools and mortality registers have also enabled a more accurate estimate of the presence of irregular migrants. Local authorities as well as border authorities are particularly good sources of data, he underlined.



Understanding the seasonality of irregular migration flows and peak months, and which nationalities have a tendency to switch from one migration route to another depending on external factors, are key in developing policies which are effective at controlling irregular flows. Bilateral agreements are an example of such measures which have led to a decrease in irregular crossings.

Moving on to how to effectively communicate on migration, Tintori acknowledged that politicians need to appeal to the concerns of their constituencies. At the same time, he shared the surprising observation based on a number of studies, that in many (Western) countries, despite the political orientation of the government in place (left – Centre – Right), migration policies do not differ so much. Once in power, political parties, once in government, tend to adopt similar policies when it comes to border and land control, legal entry and stay, and integration. Most policies with respect to border and land control and returns tend to converge towards restrictive measures

whereas they are in favour of expanding legal pathways, mostly for labour reasons, and promoting liberal integration policies.

This is a reflection of the fact that policies are not decided in a void, Tintori noted. They are the result of negotiations with a variety of actors, lobbies and interests including economic forces. Italy, which has adopted a record number of quotas for legal labour immigration mostly, is a case in point.

Concluding with some recommendations on how to effectively communicate on migration, Tintori urged politicians to acknowledge people's concerns and to convey balanced facts and data. He underlined that people have not become less favourable towards migration; rather, they are concerned about migration's salience and how it will affect their economic status and living conditions. He advised against attempts to "educate" the public but rather to explain why specific migration policies are important and needed and how they fit within one's vision of society.

He also stressed that there is no harm in openly acknowledging limitations. Law enforcement alone is not sufficient for curbing irregular migration. The opening of legal pathways is also not enough on its own. This is not a zero-sum game he emphasized. Instead, he called for a comprehensive, holistic approach that incorporates various focused measures and strategies including international co-operation and development specifically targeting the regions from which irregular migration originates. There is a need to use knowledge-brokers: people working at the inter-face between research and policy-making, in order to develop a systemic approach and support policy makers. He concluded by expressing the readiness of the OSCE's second dimension to co-operate with, and provide support to, OSCE participating States in the area of international migration governance and labour migration management.



During the discussion, Committee Members acknowledged the importance of accurate data. They raised the temporary nature of the impact of migration policies, noting that while certain bilateral agreements with countries of origin or transit might result in a decrease in migration flows, these decreases are often short-lived. Tintori responded that the effectiveness of international agreements in managing migration was affected by external events,

acknowledging that predicting migration spikes remains challenging as exogenous events such as the Arab Spring, Taliban takeover or war in Ukraine, could not be predicted by looking at historical data only.

Concerns were also expressed by Members about growing racism in Europe and the resurgence of extreme rhetoric in political discourse and how this can be countered using data. Members also asked whether studies still found that migration policies of governments of different orientations converge in 2023. The EU's new Pact on Migration and Asylum reflects a possible shift towards more restrictive policies and border control. At the same time, a lot of money will also be invested in projects to promote integration, Tintori noted.



One of the key points of discussion was the need to differentiate in the media and in political discourse between migrants and asylum seekers, as the two categories often require different policy approaches. Tintori underlined that politicians and the media had the power to make these differences clear. He also stressed that not all irregular migrants are rejected asylum seekers; the bulk of them are

in fact persons who previously had a visa or residence permit but overstayed.

One Member suggested that urban areas with a higher degree of diversity such as London tend to be more accepting towards asylum seekers, while neighbourhoods with less diversity tend to be less accepting. There is indeed evidence for an urban/rural divide, Tintori concurred, but what is more important in determining attitudes towards migration across the OSCE region is loss of purchasing power and economic status. Some Members further debated about the need for honesty about irregular migration when it is needed for the purposes of global economic competitiveness, particularly vis-à-vis countries such as China. The need to fight the lucrative business of migrant smuggling and trafficking more vigorously was also underlined. The concept of migration management was discussed in the context of different national approaches, with Canada cited as a positive example due to its transparent and planned immigration targets.

Following the presentation by Dr. Guido Tintori and the conclusion of the ensuing discussion, the Chair summarized the key takeaways of the field visits to Italy (Rome and Lampedusa) in March 2024 and the visit to Türkiye (Ankara, Adana and Gaziantep) in May 2024. These activities enabled Members to better understand the realities on the ground. The Chair emphasized the need to enhance regular pathways

for migration in order to prevent deaths at sea. The importance of learning from other countries' experiences was also underlined. The visit to Türkiye also highlighted the challenges associated with hosting over 3 million Syrian refugees for a prolonged period. The temporary status of the Syrians who have sought refuge in Türkiye was also highlighted by one Member who noted that this was an unsustainable approach given that the war in Syria persists and the conditions for return are not present. An appeal was also made to European states to respect the provisions of the 1951 Refugee Convention rather than adopting a purely security-based approach to migration. Sustainable solutions need to be based on the elimination of the 'root causes' of migration such as war, environmental disasters, economic inequalities, it was emphasized. There were also calls to prioritize national interests, with some Members pointing out the unique challenges faced by countries heavily affected by conflicts which limits the use of "one size fits all" strategies.

The Chair also sought feedback from the Committee on proposals for upcoming activities, including a field visit to Morocco in September. Members expressed their preference for a visit to Spain as well as to the border between Poland and Belarus. The Chair also raised the situation on the US-Mexico border, the West Bank and Cyprus. A suggestion was also made for the Committee to address climate change induced migration. Members commended the Chair for her work and for enabling them to participate in these valuable field visits.