SHARED MIGRATION CHALLENGES: THE TRANSATLANTIC COMMUNITY AND THE MENA REGION
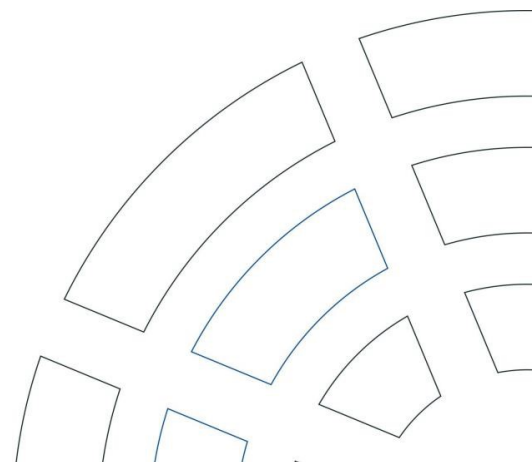
Report
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Across the Alliance, migration has moved to the centre of domestic politics. This has largely been driven by growing international migration flows linked to war, civil strife, human security, the structural challenges of countries of emigration in terms of political participation and civil liberties, low levels of scientific research and technological development, demographic pressure, economic hardship, famine, climate change, and water scarcity.

Since 2014, Europe has confronted two massive waves of war-driven migration. The first arose during the conflict in Syria and Iraq and the second unfolded in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Until Russia attacked Ukraine in March of 2022, the MENA region was the source of most migratory flows to Europe. The phenomenon has shaped relations with countries in the region and become an element of the security dialogue with it.

Those fleeing violence generally migrate close to home in the hope that they might be able to return. In the midst of the civil war in Syria, those who left their homes often initially sought refuge within the borders of their own country. Once this became untenable, they moved within the region, settling in neighbouring Türkiye, Jordan, and Lebanon. The capacities of these host countries to handle this influx varied considerably. Eventually, refugees and migrants began to make their way to Europe.

The humanitarian crises that have driven millions to leave their homes have also pushed on cleavages within NATO member countries over issues like the capacity to absorb a significant number of migrants and on broader matters pertaining to national identity. Coping with the challenge requires not only measures that deal with the push factors in crisis-ridden societies, but also with how host societies prepare to cope with the challenge and the manner in which they cooperate with the countries of emigration as well as other host countries.

NATO itself has had to adapt to the migration challenge. It has recognised important changes in the nature of war, which have compelled it to cope not only with providing security in a period of great power competition, but also with terrorism, state conflict, cyber threats, threats to energy supplies and even the security dimensions of climate change and mass migration. All these phenomena interact in ways that have prompted a shift in thinking about security and created a framework for the concept of human security.

The war in Ukraine has once again focused attention on the migration challenge. Millions have moved from Ukraine into NATO member countries. The crisis has also precipitated soaring food prices and inflation that could destabilise fragile countries to the south which have been a traditional source of migration to Europe. This could result in further waves of migration if conditions grow desperate and thus represents a looming potential challenge for the European Union (EU), NATO, and their partners in the MENA region.

It is imperative that both the EU and NATO, working in their respective spheres, lay out a clear, comprehensive, and coherent strategy to address this burgeoning migration challenge. Unregulated migration is linked to a range of security threats that NATO can only partially contain. The EU has a broad array of tools, including development assistance, border control, police, diplomacy etc., which makes a closer partnership with NATO on these matters not simply compelling but essential.

Working to ensure the MENA region's stability in the face of mounting economic, political, climate, food, and social challenges will remain a core interest of NATO and its partners in the region over the coming decades. NATO planners should continue to focus attention and provide adequate resources to defend these interests while promoting capacity building and resilience in the region. It must also ensure that refugees are never used as political pawns or instruments of political pressure. NATO member countries should, in particular, provide ample support to those so-called frontline states in the MENA region which are hosting large numbers of refugees and migrants who have fled conflict. Tough decisions will have to be made regarding the provision of humanitarian support to vulnerable communities in societies ruled by governments hostile to NATO.

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I- INTRODUCTION

1.   Over the past decade, mass migration has moved to the centre of domestic politics in Allied countries on both sides of the Atlantic. This has largely been driven by growing international migration flows linked to war, civil strife, human security, the structural shortcomings of countries migrants leave in terms of political participation and civil liberties, low levels of scientific research and technological development, demographic pressure, economic hardship, famine, climate change and water scarcity. All Allied countries have been touched by this challenge, even those seemingly remote from the most likely arrival points.

2.   As a start, it is important to define the various categories of those leaving their countries to settle elsewhere. 1) Refugees are people fleeing armed conflicts or persecution. Their situation is judged to be so dangerous that they are compelled to cross national borders to seek safety and to obtain access to assistance from host states, the international community, and NGO's. Refugees are protected by international law, specifically the 1951 Refugee Convention. 2) Asylum seekers are those who claim refugee status but whose claims have yet to be legally recognised. These people have applied for asylum on the grounds that returning to his or her country would lead to persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, or political beliefs. Asylum seekers maintain this status as long as their application is pending. Not all asylum seekers are recognised as refugees, but refugees are all initially asylum seekers. Refugee Status Determination (RSD) is a legal process that governments or the UNHCR use to determine whether a person seeking international protection is considered a refugee under international, national, or regional law. There is no single model for the conduct of RSD and while states generally oversee these processes, the UNHCR engages in the processes when states are unable or unwilling to do so. 3) Finally, migrants are those who choose to move across national borders not because of a direct threat or persecution but primarily to improve their lives by seeking employment or educational opportunities or to unite with family. Unlike refugees who simply cannot safely return home, migrants are positioned to do so. National governments handle migrants under their own immigration laws and processes.

3.   Since 2014, Europe has confronted two massive waves of conflict-driven migration. The first was largely although not exclusively the product of the civil war in Syria and the second is directly linked to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. During the 2015 refugee crisis, roughly 1.3 million migrants travelled to Europe seeking asylum. At the time, this represented the largest movement of people across the continent since World War II. Although the bulk of those seeking asylum were from war-torn Syria, the massive influx of refugees included Afghans, Nigerians, Pakistanis, Iraqis, and Eritreans, among others. There were also significant movements of economic migrants from the Western Balkans into the EU at that time. War and civil conflict in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, terrorist violence in Pakistan and Nigeria, and the long-term economic and social consequences of war in the Western Balkans were the primary drivers of these movements of people towards the most stable and prosperous countries of Europe.

4.   It is also worth noting that for many fleeing violence, Europe was only the last stop in a long process of exodus and that few of these asylum seekers originally harboured a desire to move from their country. Indeed, those fleeing violence generally migrated relatively close to home in the hope that they might soon be able to return. Syrians fleeing violence often initially sought refuge within the borders of their own country, but once this became untenable, they settled in neighbouring countries such as Türkiye, Jordan, and Lebanon. All three countries responded with generosity and did what they could to accommodate new arrivals. The burdens of this sudden and massive influx of people, however, were great, and the capacities of these countries were, to varying extents, limited. Conditions for refugees were very difficult and grew more so as the numbers rose. Indeed, security concerns mounted over time in Jordan and Lebanon, which were hosting more refugees than they could adequately care for. This was the case even for larger and wealthier Türkiye, which, by the

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end of December 2015, was hosting more than 2.5 million registered Syrian refugees, (in January 2022 that figure had risen to 3.6 million) and was increasingly burdened by the responsibilities of extending refugee protection and support (European Parliament, 8/2/2016). During this crisis, Jordan and Lebanon stopped accepting refugees and many began to look to Europe as a place for final settlement.

5.   The movement of migrants and asylum seekers from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Maghreb, and the Sahel is part of a global phenomenon in which the total number of migrants around the world doubled to roughly 270 million between 1990-2019 (Galeotti, 2021). 2015 however, was something of a watershed year for Europe as an unprecedented number of migrants arrived in countries like Greece, Italy, and Spain after undertaking perilous crossings of the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. In 2014 and 2015 alone, more than 7,000 people died while attempting such voyages. The numbers of asylum seekers entering Europe rose precipitously from 60,000 in 2010 to over one million in 2015, largely due to the wars and instability in Iraq and Syria. Many of these individuals lacked the documentation needed to enter Europe legally, and simply applied for asylum upon arrival. This humanitarian crisis triggered a political crisis across Europe by exacerbating cleavages within host societies over issues like the capacity of European societies to absorb a significant number of migrants and on broader matters pertaining to national and European identity (Landau, et. al, 2018).

6.   Migration is intrinsic to human nature and reflects a human instinct to seek the best conditions for survival. For this reason, among others, it is not a crime under international law. The rights of refugees are recognised and protected under international law. The 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol are premised on the principle of non-refoulement, which asserts that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they might face serious threats to life or freedom. This is now considered a rule of customary international law. There are, however, clear signs that several Allied governments are unhappy with the current legal status quo and worry that the lines between refugees and migrants have been blurred in practical terms. Profound disagreements have emerged about possible remedies and even the spirit in which these should be undertaken. The matter invariably shapes relations between Europe and the broader MENA region and has led to a series of cross-cutting cooperative arrangements. But it has fomented tensions as well. Polarised public opinion in both frontline and more remote NATO member states has aggravated tensions among those advocating for relatively open reception policies, on the one hand, and strict border closures, on the other. This has complicated coordinated action by governments and shaped relations with the broader MENA region.

7.   At moments of serious political and social polarisation, there is a tendency to oversimplify complex policy challenges. Recent and unfolding migration crises are no exception. Refugees and migrants are too often thrust into a single category, and insufficient efforts are undertaken to understand the myriad motives that drive their exodus and the impact of their arrival. Indeed, focused policies are required to cope with this complex challenge. It is, for example, important to recognise that many of those leaving their countries from the MENA region are not aspiring to reach Europe but are rather settling near the borders of their home countries while maintaining powerful aspirations to return home. There is also a tendency to see both refugees and migrants only as potential economic burdens when in a relatively short period of time, in fact, the arrival of migrants can bring consequential economic gains to a host country. The challenge for European governments is to distinguish between those who have a right of protection under international law and those that do not, while also integrating new arrivals adequately into their societies for both humanitarian purposes and to realise economic gains.

II- MIGRATION: A SHARED SECURITY CHALLENGE

8.   It is important to highlight the central role played by those who illegally facilitate the movement of people across borders through complex human trafficking networks which operate in Northern Africa, the Middle East, and in Europe. These networks are generally run by criminal gangs and even terrorist organizations that make windfall profits transiting people across deserts, seas, and borders. The fees charged are dauntingly high for those availing themselves of these exploitive "services", and the risks of transit are even greater. Traffickers have few incentives to provide safe passage and often put the lives of those they are moving at great risk, for example, by overcrowding boats that are unsafe for long sea journeys, or by packing people into trucks without adequate supplies of food and water. The consequences have been tragic, but the trade flourishes as the financial rewards are so lucrative to the gangs engaged in this illicit business and as the level of desperation of those fleeing their homes is so great.

9.   A range of factors can slow migration. If the quest for peace, security, human freedom, and economic opportunity are drivers of migration, then it is logical to assume that those countries that acquire these attributes or have a prospect of doing so will no longer generate large numbers of refugees or migrants. Italy, for example, was long a country of migration, but as it achieved prosperity over time, it transitioned from a country of emigration to a country of destination.

10.   There are, of course, other ways to slow migration: constructing legal, economic, and physical barriers to migration represents one tack. It is generally recognised that it is a fundamental security obligation of states to control national borders. This implies maintaining a capacity both to regulate migration and ensure that the laws governing the process of migration and asylum are enforced. How borders are managed, however, varies considerably by country, as does the kind of challenges states confront on their borders and the politics that shape national and regional policies. Within the EU, for example, those countries which border non-EU and non-NATO member countries confront unique challenges and bear additional border responsibilities. Asylum rules and agreements among countries are also fundamental to border management. If the rules are not politically, diplomatically, and practically tenable, however, their effectiveness is undermined and they then can become a source of tension and even a national security challenge in themselves (World Politics Review, 2022).

11.   Public health can also factor in. Because of lockdowns and stricter border controls linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, mass migration into Europe slowed in 2020. According to the United Nations (UN), the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent measures implemented by authorities to control its spread contributed to a 27% decrease in global migration numbers.

## III- MIGRATION WITHIN AND FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MAGHREB

12.   Until the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the greatest recent surge in migratory movements to Europe took place in 2015 and was largely driven by catastrophic civil wars in Syria and Iraq. In these cases, war, violence, political persecution, and economic hardship pushed millions out of their homes. The displaced had little choice but to resettle within their home country, in the broader region, or further afield. Although the numbers of those travelling to Europe to seek asylum in Europe subsequently fell, in part as a result of a deal brokered between the EU and Türkiye in 2016 (see below) and then the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of migrants arriving in Europe started to rise again even prior to the border crisis with Belarus in late 2021. In an attempt to weaponise migration and sow instability along the EU's and NATO's eastern borders, the

Lukashenko regime invited thousands of migrants, many from the MENA region, to fly to Belarus and subsequently move into the EU.

13.   Like Lukashenko, Russian President Vladimir Putin also sees Europe's border challenges as a point of vulnerability that he can exacerbate by creating conditions that foster mass migration. In the case of Ukraine, he has done this by rendering parts of that country uninhabitable with direct military action. Russia's invasion has compelled more than 12 million people to leave their homes, representing the largest migration crisis in Europe since the aftermath of the World War II. According to the UN, roughly 6.2 million Ukrainian refugees have moved across Europe, while another 6.3 million are "internally displaced." (Santora et al., 3/8/2022).

14.   The UN also reports that 26.6 million people worldwide are currently considered refugees and another 51 million are internally displaced. Lebanon and Jordan are among the countries that host the highest number of refugees per capita, and Türkiye remains the largest refugee hosting country. In 2019, for example, there were roughly three million Syrian refugees in Türkiye, one million in Lebanon, and over 650,000 living in Jordan. The table produced by UNHCR shows the breakdown of Syrian refugees and their locations in the broader MENA region in October 2021.
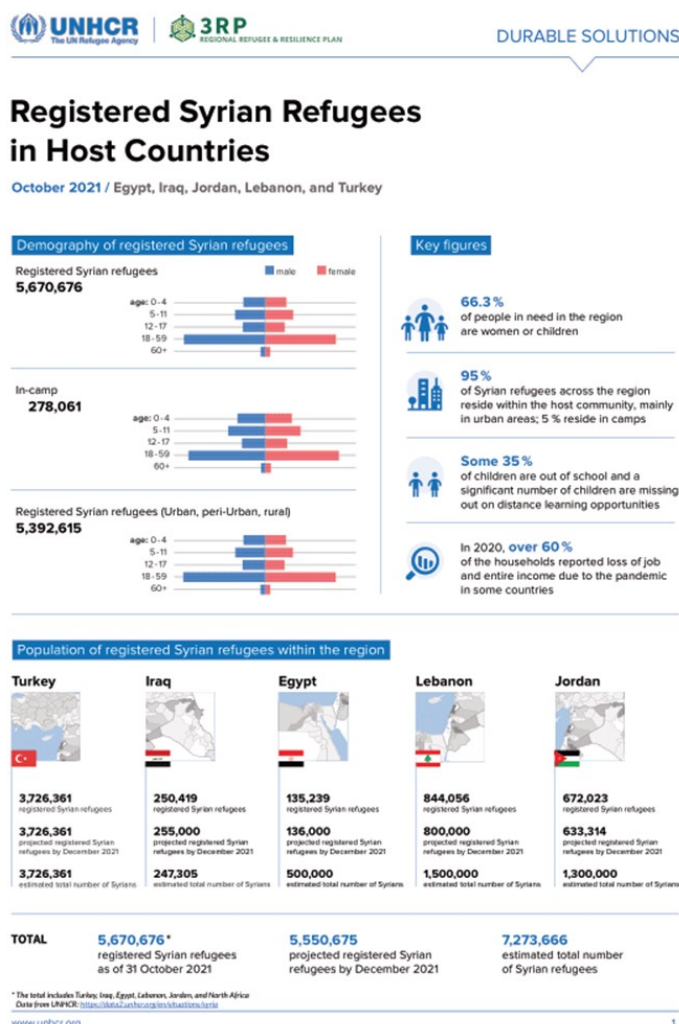
(*Source:* Reliefweb 17/11/2021)

15.   As suggested above, Lebanon, along with Türkiye and Jordan, experienced a massive influx of Syrians due to the country's civil war. At the peak of that crisis, Lebanon hosted roughly 1.2 million refugees, representing almost a fifth of its population. As of December 2021, more than 840,000 refugees were living in Lebanon (UNHCR, 2022), but authorities claim that 1.5 million Syrians currently live in the country, an overwhelming majority of whom live outside refugee camps (Karasapan, 2022). Already hosting sizeable displaced Palestinian and Iraqi communities, Lebanon hosts more refugees than its economy and political system can reasonably sustain. The presence of a large Sunni refugee community has compounded serious political challenges in the country which is politically structured to maintain a careful balance among sectarian groups (Karasapan and Shah, 2021).

16.   The collapse of the Lebanese economy has gravely complicated the situation and triggered an array of social and political tensions that invariably has had consequences for the refugee population. A UN survey found that 50% of Syrian refugee families in Lebanon in 2020 suffered from food insecurity, recording an almost twofold increase since 2019, while 90% of Syrian refugee households live below the extreme poverty line (UNHCR and WFP, 2020). This is a marked increase from the 55% recorded before the economic crisis in 2019. Both the host population and refugees struggled mightily as food prices rose by 400% in 2020 and the cost of a tank of fuel exceeded the monthly minimum wage (Khraiche and Goyeneche, 2021). The situation in 2022 could prove to be even worse as the aftershocks from Russia's invasion of Ukraine push even more people into hunger and poverty. The crisis is expected to be particularly acute in the MENA region which imports a significant share of certain food commodities like wheat from Russia and Ukraine.

17.   Jordan hosts the second highest number of refugees per capita in the world after Lebanon. It too confronts a series of economic and social challenges that complicate efforts to host a large refugee population. As of December 2021, there were 760,000 refugees under UNHCR registration living in Jordan (UNHCR, 2022). Over recent decades, Jordan has also had to cope with waves of refugees from the Palestinian territories, Iraq, and most recently Syria, and it has made enormous efforts to accommodate these often-traumatised communities. At the same time, it has grappled with various socio-economic challenges, highlighted by an unemployment rate of 25 % in 2021 and a youth unemployment rate of 48 % (Karasapan, 2022).

18.   Further compounding this challenge is the climate change-driven resource crisis that Jordan, like other countries in the region, confronts. Decreased rainfall and depleted groundwater sources have dramatically undercut water supplies in a country that UNICEF ranks as the world's second most water scarce (UNICEF, 2019). While the water situation in Jordan posed serious problems before the influx of Syrian refugees, the rapid population growth in the country due the arrival of displaced persons has further exacerbated those challenges and underlined tensions over water resources.

19.   Almost half of all registered refugees in Jordan are children, posing another significant challenge for the government which needs to provide education, healthcare, and other specialised social services for them. Human Rights Watch (HRW) has noted a significant decline of educational attainment among Syrian children living in Jordan in recent years, with only 25% of secondary school-age Syrian children attending classes. Primary education numbers are better, with 87% enrolment in elementary education in 2019. Migrants and refugees confronting harsh economic conditions made worse by the pandemic are more likely to put their children to work at earlier ages, particularly where social support networks are weak. HRW notes that children who are taken away from school are at greater risk of child labour and child marriage—both of which undermine long-term economic and development potential (HRW, 2020).

20.   Syrians currently living in Jordan are likely to remain there over the long-term. Only a fraction – 41,000 – have returned to Syria since 2018 (Karasapan, 2022). The Jordanian government along with its international partners are thus seriously challenged to address the needs of this community,

in addition to addressing the country's long-term needs such as housing, food, water, education, employment, and social integration. Rendering this challenge all the more difficult is that resistance to the presence of these refugees is rising in Jordan as it is elsewhere.

21.   Migration-related challenges are also notable across the Maghreb. Morocco, for example, must simultaneously cope with being a country both of transit and destination, as well as a source of migration itself. Morocco's role as a country of transit increased after the signing of the EU-Türkiye agreement on migration and the introduction of stricter controls along the Eastern Mediterranean route. The number of irregular migrants taking the Western Mediterranean route skyrocketed in 2018-2019, with roughly 30,000 irregular migrants following that route that year (Herbert 2019). There are also indications that more Moroccans are trying to resettle in Europe amidst rising economic troubles and socio-political frustrations at home. The country's youth feel both increasingly excluded from the political process and economically marginalised, and this seems to have acted as a catalyst for migration (Herbert, 2019).

22.   Increased migration flows towards Morocco are related to rising political unrest, civil war, and economic crisis in several West African countries. Ethnic violence and the mass deportation of immigrants in Libya in 2000 were one of the first catalysts for this movement of people. At the same time, Moroccans themselves also began to migrate in large numbers. Moroccans living abroad more than doubled from 1.5 million in 1993 to 3.4 million in 2012. The overwhelming majority had moved to Europe (87%), with France hosting 31%, and Spain roughly 25% of the total. The drivers here were family reunification, family formation, natural population increase, undocumented migration, and new labour migration to southern Europe (Kostas, 2017).

23.   Migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa and, to a lesser extent, the Middle East are starting to see Morocco as a destination rather than as a way station to Europe. As aspirant migrants are prevented from moving to Europe, an increasing number have decided to remain in Morocco rather than return to their home countries. Partly due to greater EU-Morocco cooperation on migration the UNHCR has noted a steady increase in asylum seekers arriving in Morocco itself. As of 31 December 2021, there were more than 15,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers in that country (UNHCR, 2022).

24.   To help enforce border controls and combat migrant trafficking, the EU has established a close partnership with Morocco, designating it as a "strategic partner". This partnership comes with an investment of roughly 140 million EUR to help finance more than 1,300 patrol vehicles, radar systems, and speedboats for the Moroccan security forces. In July 2022, the EU and Morocco launched a renewed partnership on migration and tackling human smuggling networks amidst renewed difficulties at the border of the Spanish city of Melilla (European Commission, 8/7/2022). In line with the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum, the bloc's partnership with Morocco is viewed as a potential model to be used with other countries in the region (Peregil and Martin, 2020).

25.   Although smaller than Morocco, Tunisia faces both similar and unique challenges. It has recently been unsettled by political instability linked partly to the suspension of the country's parliament in July 2021. Tunisia's poorly performing economy, significant youth unemployment, and mounting political pessimism have triggered a substantial increase in migration from the country. Between 2020 and mid-2021, migration rose to levels not seen since the 2010-2011 Tunisian Revolution. In 2021, Tunisian security and defence forces intercepted 35,040 irregular migrants in the country's littoral areas and off its shores, two-thirds of whom were Tunisian.

26.   In that same period, Italian authorities recorded the arrival of 28,124 Tunisians, as well as roughly 6,000 migrants from other countries who had travelled through Tunisia. Like Morocco, Tunisia has undergone a significant influx of migrants from Africa since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these intend to stay in Tunisia while others hoped to move on to Europe (Herbert,1/2022). UNHCR recorded 9,374 asylum seekers in Tunisia in December 2021, almost 4,000 of whom registered in 2021 (UNHCR, 2021). This trend may indicate that more people are

asking for asylum in Tunisia, for example after they have failed to use Tunisia successfully as a point of departure for Europe.

27.   Instability and political uncertainty across the Maghreb since 2016 have inspired more of the region's inhabitants to migrate (Herbert, 2019). In 2018, almost 60,000 irregular migrants, primarily starting their journey from Morocco and Algeria, were apprehended in Spain. After a brief decrease in 2019, the number of irregular migrants from the Western Maghreb rose substantially. Spanish authorities alone have detained over 85,000 people since 2020 (UNHCR, 2022).

28.   Under these circumstances, Tunisian migration to Europe has undergone a threefold increase since 2018, with more than 15,000 Tunisians making their way to Europe in 2021. By the end of 2021, Tunisians managed to overtake Moroccans, Syrians, and sub-Saharan Africans for the most arrivals to Europe (IOM, 2022). Indeed, after 2020 and until Russia invaded Ukraine, Moroccans and Tunisians sought refuge within the EU in greater numbers than any nationality—although Ukraine is now the largest source of incoming migration.

29.   Political pessimism and economic marginalisation constitute the most compelling push factors driving Tunisians to migrate. Central and southern regions such as Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid, and Tataouine continue to suffer from economic marginalisation and political frustration following the 2011 revolution. As a result, inhabitants from these regions tend to migrate in higher numbers compared to those living elsewhere in the country (Herbert and Gallien, 2017).

30.   Libya has become a central transit point for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa including the increasingly unstable Sahel, and this is due both to its location, the breakdown of state authority, the prevalence of human traffickers, and weak border controls in the country. The flow of migrants from Libya to Europe across the Mediterranean has accordingly increased substantially. Moreover, internal instability has pushed refugees and migrants living in Libya to leave. Many of the sub-Saharan refugees and migrants passing through Libya arrive from Sudan, Niger, and Algeria (UNHCR, 2017).

IV- MIGRATORY ROUTES INTO EUROPE: A 360-DEGREE PERSPECTIVE

31.   Most refugees and migrants making their way to Europe in the midst of the Syrian crisis came through the Aegean Sea from Türkiye to Greece and from there travelled to the EU by land through South-eastern Europe (Beauchamp, 2015). This represented a significant change from early migrations. Indeed, before 2015, most refugees had reached Europe by crossing the Mediterranean from Libya to Italy, as Libyan state institutions and its capacity to control its borders were gravely weakened because of the civil war. Most migrants travelling through Libya were then from sub-Saharan Africa. Some were fleeing instability including civil war and the breakdown of state authority in parts of the Sahel. Others were economic migrants seeking opportunities to work in Europe. The Aegean route - often called the East Mediterranean route - by contrast, was the primary pathway to Europe for Middle Eastern migrants and refugees and those from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Many Syrians, Iraqis, and Afghans who followed these routes were fleeing war and violence. This influx proved a massive shock to South-Eastern Europe in 2015 and led to border shutdowns throughout the region. But this only exacerbated the crisis as migrants were compelled to move constantly to evade controls. Many suffered in the process and were deprived of basic services. This desperate situation only changed after Germany and several other countries agreed to suspend normal asylum procedures and accept significant numbers of displaced people. This decision, the onset of winter, and the 2016 EU-Türkiye migration deal eventually slowed this influx. That agreement, however, has been a source of some controversy as Türkiye argues that the EU

has not upheld its end of the bargain on visa liberalisation, while some in the EU counter that authorities in Türkiye were not fully controlling the outflow of migrants to the EU (Rankin 2/3/2020).

32. Although the number of people arriving on the Greek islands from Türkiye fell from a peak of 7,000 a day to a few hundred following the agreement, the numbers started to rise again in 2019. The EU has provided substantial financial support to help Türkiye manage the refugee burden and, in many respects, the arrangement can be understood as a success if not a solution to the challenges in the Aegean. It slowed down the pace of irregular migration in the region while providing the means to ensure humane conditions for vulnerable refugees. Türkiye has largely succeeded in integrating these refugees although there are obvious limits to the economic opportunities available to such a large group of new arrivals. The economic situation in Türkiye has made the problem more acute, and there is a palpable sense that the burden has grown too great and that more support is needed from its allies and partners to help underwrite the costs of supporting and integrating the sizeable refugee population if a return to Syria is unlikely. One recently published academic paper on the topic suggests that "local integration efforts should be much more heavily supported by the EU – via financial and non-financial means – since they represent the only way forward that caters to EU interests, Turkish anxieties, and Syrian refugees' rights" (Adar and Püttmann, 2022). The paper goes on to advocate for the resettlement of some of these refugees in Europe as an expression of burden sharing and to enhance trust between the EU and Türkiye, greater municipal cooperation as cities in Europe and Türkiye often assume the greatest burden in settling refugees, and a micro-lending program to help kickstart Turkish-Syrian businesses and thereby create economic opportunity out of a difficult situation

33. In recent years, the flow of migrants into Europe from Africa, the Middle East, and Afghanistan has coursed through an inordinately broad array of routes from the Western Atlantic, across the Mediterranean, through the Balkans and in the East and North most recently through Belarus. Currently, the migration narrative in Europe is dominated by the massive influx of Ukrainians fleeing into neighbouring countries including Poland, Romania, Hungary, and Moldova and further afield including the United States and Canada to escape Russian aggression.

34. One lesson from the last fifteen years is that there is no single route into Europe, and no one choke point that can effectively control mass movements of people fleeing violence or seeking to improve their lives. Efforts to close one pathway simply redirects migration traffic elsewhere. The potential points of entry into Europe are indeed numerous, and this demands broad multilateral and multifaceted approaches to the challenge, 360-degree situational awareness, comprehensive approaches to border management, and a degree of solidarity that can sometimes be difficult to muster. NATO can support some of these efforts as it has in the Aegean, but it is only one of many governmental, inter-governmental, and NGO organisations that need to engage.

35. Although COVID-19-related travel restrictions slowed migration into Europe, the number of overall irregular crossings into Europe sharply rose again in 2021. Frontex estimates that cases of irregular border crossings into the EU in the first nine months of 2021 rose 68% to 133,900. This was 47% more than in 2019 before the outbreak of the pandemic. The most significant increase transpired along the Central Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes.

36. The Eastern Mediterranean route refers to irregular entering the EU through Greece, Cyprus, and Bulgaria. This was the preferred route used in 2015, when thousands of refugees sought shelter from the war in Syria. As suggested above, since then, the number of irregular arrivals following this route has fallen considerably largely due to agreements struck between the EU and Türkiye to hinder this flow. The Eastern Mediterranean was the only route into the EU along which illegal border crossings fell in the first nine months of 2021. The 13,190 detections made in that period represented a 17% decline from the same period in 2020. Cyprus was the destination of nearly 50% of new arrivals in 2021 until September and most migrants following this path came from Syria, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

37.   The Western Mediterranean route refers to irregular arrivals to Spain, both by sea to mainland Spain and by land to the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla in Northern Africa. It has been largely used by migrants from Algeria and Morocco, but migrants from sub-Saharan Africa have also sought to reach Europe in this way. This influx peaked in 2018. One reason was the EU's revamped partnership with Morocco that, among other things, reinforced border controls and efforts to combat human trafficking. Between January and July 2021, 14,100 illegal border crossings were reported on the Western Mediterranean route, 22% more than in 2020.

38.   The West African route refers to arrivals to the EU through Spain's Canary Islands. In 2020, it emerged as the most-used sea route to reach Spain, with ten times as many arrivals than in the same period the previous year. Boats following this route generally launched from Morocco, the Western Sahara, Mauritania, Senegal, and Gambia accounted for more than half of sea arrivals to Spain. 11,700 migrants illegally crossed into Europe after following this route in the first nine months of 2021, 93% more than in 2020.

39.   The Central Mediterranean route generally describes the irregular sea arrivals to Italy and Malta, the majority having departed from Tunisia and Libya. This was a particularly important route to the EU between 2015-2017. After two years of low numbers of irregular migrants using this route, numbers jumped considerably again in 2020. This, turn, led to increased sea patrols and greater EU cooperation with Libya to slow the movement of migrants across Libya and its waters. An estimated 47,620 illegal border crossings were registered in the first nine months of 2021 across the Central Mediterranean route or roughly 87% more than for the same period in 2020. Most migrants travelling along this route originated from Tunisia, Bangladesh, and Egypt.

40.   The Western Balkans has been the primary pathway into the EU for refugees and migrants, particularly in 2015 during the height of the conflict in Syria. While numbers did drop for a period of time, this trend has continued, and according to Frontex, the EU's external border agency, the Western Balkan route accounted for half of the total irregular entry detections in the first seven months of 2022. From January to July 2022, 70,770 illegal crossings were detected along the Western Balkan route representing nearly three times the total from the same period in 2021. The main nationalities recorded traversing this route included refugees and migrants from Afghanistan, Syria, and Türkiye.
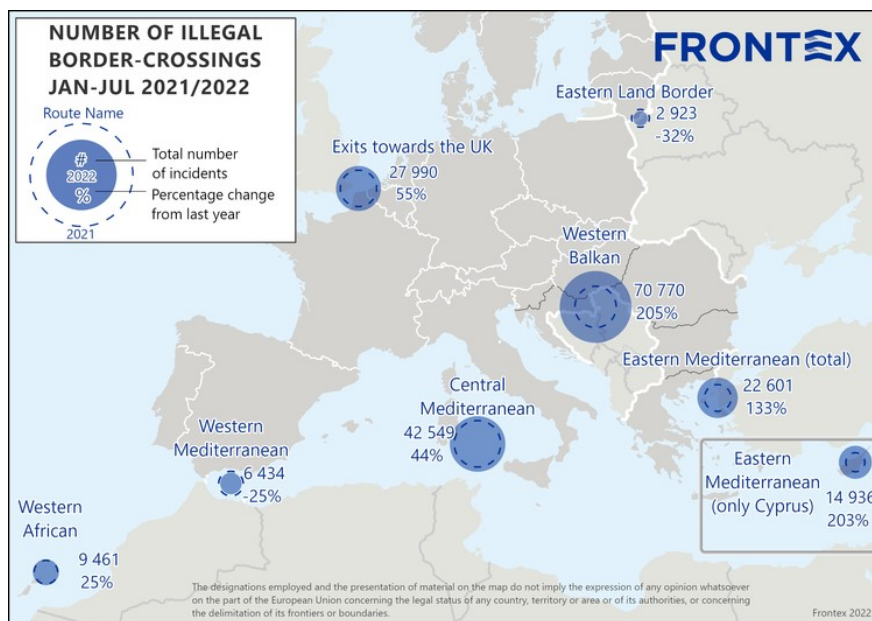
(Source: Frontex News Release, 12/8/2022 Frontex, 2022).

41.   In July 2021, amidst political upheaval in Belarus triggered by rigged presidential elections and a deteriorating human rights situation, Alexander Lukashenko, the country's illegitimate president, threatened to "flood" the EU with human traffickers, drug smugglers, and armed migrants. The government subsequently organised flights and internal travel to facilitate the transit of migrants towards its borders with the EU. In so doing, he opened another route for migrants from the MENA region to enter Europe. His actions also represented a willful attempt to weaponise migration and destabilise the EU's and NATO's eastern border states. The countries most impacted by this cynical strategy were Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. The majority of those who travelled to Belarus were Iraqi, Afghan, and Syrian nationals, most of whom had no documents allowing them to enter the EU. This meant that many were left stranded in the cold at Belarus' western borders without any assistance from Belarusian authorities who often tried to force them across. The crisis put Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland at the front line of migration from the MENA region, a particular challenge these three countries had heretofore not confronted.

42.   This situation constituted both a geopolitical and a humanitarian crisis. With the unequivocal support of the Kremlin, Lukashenko cruelly used these migrants as a political weapon. The apparent short-term goal was to exact retribution for the collective Western decision not to recognise the Belarusian presidential election in which Lukashenko was falsely declared the winner and to respond to Western sanctions that followed the regime's repression of widespread protests following the flawed voting process. Lukashenko manufactured a fake humanitarian crisis by exploiting holes in the EU's immigration system, all the while hoping to expose alleged European hypocrisy on asylum issues to divert public attention away from his regime's own human rights violations. It is likely that the Kremlin saw this as a dry run for the refugee crisis it was already planning to precipitate in Ukraine through the armed invasion of that country.

Flights from Middle East to Minsk

Source: FlightRadar24   BBC

REPORT – 026 GSM 22 E rev.2 fin

43.   The governments of Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland responded to this form of hybrid warfare by effectively sealing their borders with Belarus and preventing migrants brought there by the Belarusian regime from entering EU territory.Türkiye took swift action at the outstart of the crisis, following the diplomatic outreach undertaken by the European Commission, to stop all citizens of Iraq, Syria, and Yemen from flying on to Belarus through its territory. As a result of these concerted efforts, the number of daily irregular arrivals dropped sharply by the end of the fall 2021 (Bejan and Nabi, 2021). The closing of the border was not without its critics, some of whom suggested that the borders should have been opened to process asylum claims. This crisis exposed a genuine tension between normal migration procedures and the need to respond to what essentially amounted to a hybrid attack aimed at exploiting European laws and norms. This existing tension underlines why the weaponisation of migration is not a new tactic and is likely to be used again against Allies going forward (Galeotti, 2021).

44.   The image of millions of Ukrainian refugees displaced across Europe has resonated deeply in the Middle East. Although there are geopolitical reasons to draw distinctions between the current refugee flow from Ukraine and recent surges from the MENA region, Africa, and Afghanistan, there are also many linkages. Russia's role in triggering mass movements of refugees is certainly one of them. For example, Kremlin-ordered attacks on Syrian civilian targets in Aleppo foreshadowed the criminal tactics that it is now employing in Ukraine. During the war in Syria, Russia purposefully targeted civilian infrastructure, hospitals, schools, and housing to support Syrian President Assad's brutal campaign to defeat the insurgency he confronted in his own country. The deliberate targeting of civilians led millions of non-combatants to leave their homes and to take refuge elsewhere in Syria, in neighbouring countries, and in Europe. This pattern repeated itself on a massive scale after Russia attacked Ukraine. Staunch Ukrainian resistance has upended the Kremlin's fundamentally flawed expectations for a quick victory. In response, Putin's regime has resorted to a terror bombing campaign that rapidly drove millions from their homes and out of the country to countries along its western border.

V- THE ECONOMICS OF MIGRATION

45.   The economic impact of migration is often misunderstood or mischaracterised (Mohieldin and Ratha, 2019). Those who argue that migrants simply overwhelm high-income societies, steal jobs from citizens, undercut wages, or sap public finances often do so without empirical support for their argument (Ratha, 2019). The perception that migration itself constitutes a deadweight economic loss for a host country has very little to do with the underlying economic evidence. Indeed, economic studies suggest just the opposite, particularly over the medium to long term, at least under certain conditions. Indeed, the view among most economists is that migration can have salutary impacts on industrial societies, particularly those where the local population is rapidly aging (Engler *et al*, 2020; Portes, 2019; OECD, 2014; IMF, 2020). This does not mean that the process comes without costs; it does, particularly when policy measures are not undertaken to foster integration, move migrants into the productive economy and facilitate social and cultural adjustment. Deriving broadly- based economic gains from migration thus presupposes a degree of state and societal capacity to handle a sudden influx of people. Obviously, not all states have this capacity.

46.   Immigrants both increase the labour pool and help forge new trading opportunities with their country of origin. If forward-thinking policy measures are undertaken that allow refugees to work and study, an influx of migrants can foster more rapid economic growth than a national economy would otherwise undergo (IMF, 2020). In a 2016 study, researchers at the IMF found that a 1% increase in the migrant share of the adult population correlated with an increase in per capita GDP and productivity of roughly 2% (Portes, 2019). It is also misleading to argue that only high-skilled migrants will benefit an economy. The aging, depopulating, and economically declining city of Lewiston in the US state of Maine underwent something of an economic boom after hundreds of generally unskilled

Somali refugees settled there in the early 2000s. According to a Tufts University study, the refugees' arrival transformed Lewiston into one of the fastest growing communities in Maine. The crime rate declined, rent prices stabilised, and the city's economy and population began to grow (Tufts Journeys Project, 2021).

47.   Empirically, there is substantial evidence suggesting that migration, even in cases involving a sudden and large influx of migrants, seldom has a sustained negative impact on wages and employment rates for domestic workers (Card, 1990; Peri and Yasenov, 2019). Migrants' skillsets in developed countries tend to be more complementary than substitutive of domestic workers and, in aggregate terms, this tends to generate economic growth (IMF, 2020). Policies that facilitate immigrant integration can amplify these positive economic effects and offset the short-term fiscal impact of settling new arrivals. These pro-growth policies generally include spending on vocational training, adult education, language courses, easier validation of professional titles, and active policies that incentivise labour market entry (Portes, 2019). The German experience with a large influx of Syrian refugees provides a case in point. As noted above, between 2015-2016, Germany accepted 1.2 million refugees. Although many critics imagined that this would impose great burdens on the German economy, the German economy boomed: "Refugees have both shared in and contributed to Germany's rising prosperity in these years. In every year since 2016, the number of refugees who are employed, proficient in the German language, or enrolled in either public education or vocational training has climbed steadily upward" (Hockenos, 2020). One area which has proved more difficult in Germany has been incorporating Syrian women into the workplace.

48.   Migration can certainly impose serious costs on the country of origin. But while a "brain drain" and the loss of a dynamic element of the population can be concerning, and devastating in some cases, there is also degree of compensation in terms of remittance payments to remaining family members which can become a critical source of foreign exchange and investment in the country of emigration (Ratha, 2019). In 2019 alone, global remittances amounted to EUR 719 billion, with EUR 548 billion flowing to low and middle-income countries (McCarthy, 2021). This number exceeds both official development assistance and foreign direct investment (Mohieldin and Ratha, 2019). Countries of origin can also benefit when migrants or refugees return home with new skills, commercial links, and capital. In 2015, three MENA region countries were among the world's ten greatest sources of remittance payments: Saudi Arabia (2nd), Kuwait (7th), and Qatar (9th). NATO members on this list were: the United States (1st), Germany (6th), France (8th), and Luxembourg (10th) (Swing, 2018).

49.   There can nonetheless be substantial burdens linked to a significant influx of migrants, particularly in more fragile countries lacking the means to underwrite comprehensive integration programmes. These burdens include pressure on already heavily burdened and underfunded public services such as schools, housing, and healthcare; urban overcrowding; increased pressure on fragile employment markets; persistent linguistic and cultural barriers; increased pollution and pressure on natural resources like water; cultural, racial, and sectarian tensions and discrimination; and sudden and unanticipated gender imbalances. These are challenges which Jordan and Lebanon, in particular, have had to confront in the face of a massive influx of refugees fleeing war and violence.

VI- EU MIGRATION POLICY AND COOPERATION WITH THE MENA REGION

50.   The EU's capacity to address emerging humanitarian crises was put under unprecedented stress in 2015, when roughly 1.8 million refugees and irregular migrants fleeing conditions of extreme insecurity in their countries crossed into the EU (European Parliament, 2017). Their determination

to cross the Mediterranean Sea under dire conditions expressed their desperation to reach Europe. Indeed, between 2015-2016 close to 9,000 migrants perished while attempting to make that journey (UNHCR, 2022). The EU has accordingly had to make a range of adjustments to cope with a problem that increasingly seems perennial in nature. Frontex currently has a standing corps of 5,000 border officers with plans to expand to 10,000 active officers by 2027. It has also enhanced the European Border and Coast Guard's mission. The EU plays an important role in migration management and is tasked with training border guards in Africa and repatriating asylum seekers whose applications are rejected. There are currently three active Frontex operations across the Mediterranean working both to crack down on people smuggling networks and to rescue those in danger (European Council, 2022). EU support for members charged with controlling the EU's borders is a critical expression of broader solidarity among member states in the face of these shared challenges.

51.   The so-called Dublin Regulation establishes rules governing the examination of asylum applications submitted by those seeking international protection under the Geneva Conventions and the EU Qualification Directive within the EU. It holds that asylum seekers must remain in the first EU member state in which they arrive. Critics have long argued that this system undermined collective EU approaches to migration by placing enormous and asymmetrical burdens on frontier countries. Indeed, Europe's asylum system has created a "problem of solidarity" between members responsible for exposed external borders and many of its interior countries. Several southern and eastern EU member states, which are most often the first country of entry, have felt overburdened with asylum requests. Meanwhile, some non-frontline countries had been less willing to accept asylum seekers from the MENA region, increasing tensions among member states and rendering it difficult to establish a more sustainable relocation scheme.

52.   Attempts at fundamentally reforming this system have thus far not succeeded, raising important questions about whether alternative approaches can both generate desired results and conform more closely to international humanitarian and European law. During the height of the refugee influx into Europe, the European Commission attempted to reform the Common European Asylum System and the associated Dublin Regulation to allocate asylum seekers more efficiently across the EU. This proposal would have shared incoming asylum seekers among EU member states premised on their respective population and GNP. The proposal, however, failed to pass through the European Parliament. As a result, the Dublin Regulation continues to provide the framework for addressing irregular migration into the EU and the problem of solidarity and burden sharing, for all intents and purposes, persists. The Ukrainian refugee crisis could add more strains to the system, although there appears to be a high level of solidarity among all European governments in the face of this particular crisis.

53.   In September 2020, the European Commission outlined its "New Pact on Migration and Asylum" - a series of legislative proposals that collectively would create a "comprehensive and common European framework" for migration management (European Parliament, 2019). In so doing, the Commission declared that "the current system no longer works", while maintaining that the "new pact would address the shortcomings of the previous system and replace it with a more predictable and reliable migration management system" (European Commission, 2020). The plan addressed border management and aimed to integrate the internal and external dimensions of migration policies. It called for "fair sharing of responsibility and solidarity" and proposed a "flexible contribution system" in which member states voluntarily agree to relocate asylum seekers from their first point of entry and "assume responsibility" for those asylum seekers whose applications for asylum have been rejected (European Commission, 2020). The Commission warned that member governments need to adopt this comprehensive system in order to avoid returning to *ad hoc* measures which threaten broader border and migration management in the EU. The Pact stresses the importance of migration partnerships with countries of origin and transit and promises to work to improve migration governance, help support refugees and host communities in partner countries including by creating new economic opportunities to address root causes of these movements while developing legal pathways for migrants whose skills are needed in Europe. At the same time, it will seek to reinforce

the capacity of partners to strike at illegal human trafficking operations (European Commission-Migration and Home Affairs).

54.   On 22 June 2022, the European Council adopted key elements of the first stage of the European policy reform on asylum and migration. The declaration on a temporary solidarity mechanism was agreed by 18 Member States (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Spain, Finland, France, Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania), as well as Norway, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein (European Parliament," A New Pact on Asylum and Migration and accompanying legal proposals). Negotiations on the Pact, however, have deadlocked and progress has still not been reached on critical issues including the establishment of a system for EU states to equitably share responsibility for new arrivals at EU borders.

55.   The Commission recognises that human trafficking generates billions of dollars for criminal networks throughout the world. These businesses are frequently administered by terrorist organisations that use the profits generated from human, drug, and weapons trafficking to consolidate their organisations, improve their military capabilities, and ultimately conduct operations. Just as the drug trade in some areas has helped consolidate the power of certain organisations, human trafficking is also a major component in bankrolling terrorist activities. The EU is one of the most important destinations for this smuggling, and those who engage in it are generally also carrying out human rights violations. Those who move migrants across the sea have exposed countless lives to extreme danger, and this is reflected in rising fatality figures. Countering the illegal industry of people smuggling is thus not simply a border control issue, it is also a critical security and policing obligation of the international community and governments committed to maintaining international legal and humanitarian norms. Moreover, these networks are almost invariably tied to a range of other illicit activities including money laundering, weapons trafficking, and drug smuggling.

56.   The EU's New Pact promised to deepen operational cooperation among member states and with partner countries along migratory routes and their law enforcement agencies to both prosecute and investigate human trafficking. It will follow the money trail by engaging in financial investigations while establishing legal frameworks and prosecutorial and judicial links to facilitate prosecution. Europol has established a European Migrant Smuggling Centre to facilitate information exchange and operational cooperation on migrant smuggling among EU countries. Its Internet Referral Unit is also using cyber tools to generate information and evidence about these criminal networks and their operations. The EU will facilitate capacity building activities for police and judicial authorities in non-EU countries. It will also address the illegal employment of irregular migrants which has been one of the drivers of migration movements.

57.   On 11 November 2021, the European Parliament agreed to transform the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) into the EU Agency for Asylum, which was one of the changes proposed in the new migration pact. The Parliament hopes to improve the EU's current asylum procedures by deploying an additional 500 new experts to support the agency (Council of the European Union, 2021). The agency will work to ensure that member states comply with human rights obligations in terms of international protection procedures and reception conditions (Council of the European Union, 2021). Other proposals for the New Pact on Migration and Asylum remain under development. However, asymmetrical perspectives on the issue have made collaborative action difficult to achieve.

58.   In 2016, the EU established a European migrant smuggling centre at Europol to help member states crack down on migrant smuggling (Privitera, 2021). Many of these smuggling operations engage in other criminal operations including weapons and drug trafficking and the financing of terrorism. Indeed, there is ample evidence of links between human trafficking, terrorist networks, and terrorist finance. Terrorists directly engage in these rackets to finance their operations. Terrorist groups use human trafficking as a driver for recruitment, for example, by exploiting female trafficking

victims to attract and retain fighters; to raise money to fund their operations; and to extend their influence. Among the horrific examples of these links has been trafficking of organs by ISIS and other armed groups to fund operations; Boko Haram's use of child beggars; forced marriages in Timbuktu, Mali by Ansar Dine and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb; Daesh kidnapping of Eritrean migrants in Libya for sexual exploitation, including in forced marriage and the trafficking of Yazidi women and girls (Huckerby, 2019).

59.   There are also concerns in NATO member countries that increased unregulated migration has allowed these criminal and terrorist groups to embed themselves more deeply in Europe. Their activities increase the scope of the informal grey and black markets where they operate, and they pose a growing threat to rules-based economies as a result. This is a challenge for NATO members and NATO itself and constitutes yet another reason why more concerted action is needed to contain the phenomenon. Again, some of this remains outside of the scope of NATO but sharing data and best practices and offering alliance assets where they can support the work of agencies directly engaged in the fight against human trafficking **is logical** in the current strategic climate.

VII- CHALLENGES TO NATO SECURITY

60.   NATO has recognised important changes in the nature of war which have compelled it to cope not only with providing security in a period of great power competition, but also with terrorism, intra-state conflict, cyber threats, threats to energy supplies and even the security dimensions of climate change and mass migration. All these phenomena interact in ways that have prompted a shift in thinking about security and created a framework for the concept of human security. Human security has become a critical pillar of security policy making in democratic societies and, appropriately, it accords primacy to people. This approach to security directly addresses matters like human trafficking; the protection of children in conflict; preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence; protection of civilians; cultural property protection and the fundamental links between the mass movement of people and security.

61.   NATO links the concept of human security to risks and threats to populations where NATO is conducting operations, missions, or activities. For this reason, it actively works both to reduce and cope with these threats and places the protection of civilian populations at the heart of its crisis prevention and management operations. The Alliance has adumbrated an array of policies and guiding documents concerning human security as it pertains to combatting trafficking in human beings (2004 – ongoing update in 2021), children and armed conflict (2015) and the protection of civilians (2016), (NATO, 11/3/2022). NATO has also made societal resilience a key pillar of its overarching strategic posture. All of these are relevant to the migration challenge.

62.   NATO's policy on combatting trafficking in human beings commits NATO member countries and other countries participating in NATO-led operations to reinforcing efforts to prevent and oppose such activities. The Alliance has recognised that armed conflict and related factors of gender inequality, political instability, and poverty can dramatically increase the number of displaced and impoverished people, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and forced migration. NATO has noted the links among human trafficking, corruption, and organised crime while recognising the threat these pose to peace and security. More broadly, the Afghan experience and the current crisis with Russia over its vicious and criminal attack on Ukraine raise a range of broad questions about the relevance of the corruption-security nexus. NATO acknowledges that other organisations will generally take the lead in dealing with these challenges, but it works to support these efforts and inculcate awareness of these threats in its planning and operations.

63.   NATO is also addressing other dimensions of the migration challenge. In 2012, it issued Military Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict that provided a framework for integrating United

Nations Security Council Resolution 1612 into training and education. In 2015, NATO developed military guidelines on the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). These guidelines provide strategic direction to reduce the risk of such violence, and NATO personnel are obliged to prevent, act, and stop it from happening wherever possible. At the Warsaw Summit in 2016, NATO Leaders adopted a NATO Policy for the Protection of Civilians covering the protection of civilians in NATO-led operations, missions, and activities.

64.   NATO has also directly engaged in operations that aim to cope with the security consequences of mass migration. During the Syrian migrant crisis, NATO dedicated itself to assisting Allies coping with the challenge. Units of Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2) carried out a series of drills as part of NATO's participation in the international efforts to cut the lines of illegal trafficking and illegal migration in the Aegean Sea. Following a request from Germany, Greece, and Türkiye in February 2016, NATO agreed to support international efforts in dealing with this crisis. It focused on thwarting illegal trafficking and illegal migration in the Aegean Sea through intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, providing real-time information to Greece, Türkiye, and Frontex as the migration crisis unfolded.

65.   NATO's Aegean Sea and Mediterranean – Operation Sea Guardian – covers various maritime security operation tasks and contributes to international efforts to assist with the migrant and refugee-related challenges. As illegal mass migration can have direct implications for Alliance security and particularly the security of Allies along the Mediterranean littoral, NATO's maritime deployment assists Allied coastguards, as well as the EU and Frontex, in carrying out their duties more effectively in the face of the challenge. NATO's SNMG2 has carried out reconnaissance, monitoring, and surveillance of illegal crossings in the territorial waters of Greece and Türkiye, as well as in international waters. SNMG2 is one of two Standing NATO Maritime Groups – the other is SNMG1 - both of which operate under the authority of Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM), in Northwood, United Kingdom. These are multinational, integrated maritime forces permanently available to NATO to perform a range of tasks including exercises and operational missions. These deployments are generally composed of between two and six ships. NATO's ships are larger, and their sensors and radars have a broader reach than those of Frontex, so the information it shares can be enormously helpful. All ships including those engaged in NATO activities are obliged by international maritime law to rescue people in distress at sea. NATO continues to work with the EU on refugee and migrant matters. It has forged close working relations with Frontex, exchanges liaison officers with it and shares information to assist Frontex in carrying out its duties. The NATO Secretary General has also discussed the refugee and migrant crisis with several EU counterparts (NATO, 17/5/2021).

66.   NATO cannot ignore the role strategic competitors and rivals are playing in the MENA region, and consideration of migration challenges needs to be factored into these calculations. Russia has most clearly sought to challenge the security interest of NATO and its partners in the region and has done so, in part, by both creating and weaponising refugees. This was evident in Syria, where its military operations were an important catalyst of the country's refugee crisis. The Kremlin also supported Belarus when it used migrants from the region to destabilise EU and NATO borders, and clearly perceives the creation of millions of refugees and internally displaced persons as a weapon in its war on Ukraine. China plays a significantly more subdued but nonetheless increasingly important role in the region. It has a greater stake in regional stability than Russia but some of its economic activities there could be a harbinger of its long-term ambition to increase its military presence and diplomatic and economic leverage. The Alliance will need to monitor this over time.

67.   NATO's response to the crisis in the Mediterranean highlights the Alliance's role in providing security and stability not only to its member states, but also to the broader neighbourhood. As migratory flows towards Europe continue due to persistent push factors, NATO's support in assisting with the consequences of this humanitarian crisis, both at its southern border and beyond, has provided additional security to the region. By helping to foster security, NATO can also assist the region as it addresses the root causes of the migration challenge. It is worth noting that NATO has

activated its own crisis management mechanism (EADRCC, Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre) to better cope with the Ukrainian humanitarian emergency. This is indicative of how the Alliance now approaches humanitarian challenges including the sudden mass movement of people.

68.   Finally, the Alliance needs to take a holistic view of security, and it will continue to do so as far as the MENA region is concerned. Russia's war on Ukraine has important implications for the region, particularly given its impact on both energy and food markets. Soaring food and energy prices could in themselves become a catalyst for future mass migration. Terrorists and criminal groups could exploit these changing market conditions to gain leverage over societies in which they operate, and this could increase instability and other drivers of migration. As NATO members wean themselves off Russian oil and gas, the MENA region will become even more strategically important for Allied nations which will continue to have a vested interest in the region's stability and its capacity to operate free from the kind of leverage that Russia and, to a lesser extent, China seeks to exert. This imperative will invariably shape the broader context in which MENA migration issues are considered among the Allies and in concert with their regional partners.

VIII- CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

69.   The migration challenge confronted by Allied countries has increased inexorably over the last decade. The current war in Ukraine is only the latest chapter of this unfolding narrative and follows only seven years after the last mass migration to the continent. Russia's cataclysmic invasion of Ukraine has implications for the countries on the southern flank of NATO which until recently had been the primary source of migration to Europe. But pressures driving migration from the south are likely to mount once again if global food prices continue to soar, a phenomenon that would exacerbate social and economic tensions in much of the MENA region. NATO Allies must remain aware of this risk and plan accordingly. Indeed, of all the geographical areas in which NATO is engaged, it is perhaps in the MENA region that the third core task of cooperative security is most relevant, particularly in combatting terrorism, fostering conditions conducive to long-term development cooperation, combatting climate change, reinforcing stable energy markets, and achieving a range of other ambitions that can be furthered by strong partnerships that promote best practices and interoperability at the political, civil and military levels.

70.   It is imperative that both the EU and NATO, working in their respective spheres, lay out a clear, comprehensive, and coherent strategy to address this burgeoning migration challenge. This is a problem all Allied countries confront, but European Allies obviously have the most immediate stake in managing the problem and will accordingly play a leading role in developing a comprehensive approach that will engage national governments as well as the EU and NATO. As part of this effort, Allies will need to improve situational awareness in the Mediterranean region while reinforcing linkages with Mediterranean and Middle Eastern partners to enhance the third core task of security cooperation, including defining and enhancing the role of, and adequately resourcing, the NATO Strategic Direction South HUB (NSD-S). A sense of solidarity and shared destiny should inform these efforts. If anything, the Ukraine crisis and the refugee crisis it has precipitated has only increased this sense of solidarity. More ambitious multinational support should be provided to those member countries most exposed to refugee and migration flows and a more equitable sharing of the burden of settlement should be sought

71.   There are many compelling reasons why it makes sense for NATO to strengthen cooperation with the EU. Coping with the migration challenge ranks high among these. Unregulated migration is linked to a range of security threats that NATO can only partially contain. The EU has a broad array of tools, including development assistance, border control, police, diplomacy etc., which makes a closer partnership with NATO on these matters not simply compelling but essential.

72.   NATO itself can provide vital support to countries of the region that either directly or indirectly shape the dynamics of migration and the forces that drive it. These include bolstering defence and security capabilities, building resilience, reinforcing counterterrorism, intelligence sharing, border control, cyber security and civil protection. Stability Policing activities can help create the Safe and Secure Environment (SASE) necessary to begin to address the root causes of migration flows and supporting actions for stability in the region. This policy area is supported by NATO's Stability Policing Centre of Excellence in Vicenza, Italy.

73.   In recent years war, civil strife, terrorism, and shortages of food, water, and energy resources, have placed enormous social, economic, and political pressures on the southern Mediterranean and Middle East. Although there has been a tendency in recent years to suggest that the greatest looming strategic challenges to Allies ultimately lie in Asia, the war in Ukraine has refocused attention not only on Europe but also on the MENA region. Working to ensure the region's stability in the face of mounting economic, political, climate, food, and social challenges will remain a core interest of NATO and its partners in the region over the coming decades. NATO planners should continue to focus attention and provide adequate resources to defend these interests and must ensure that refugees are never used as political pawns or instruments of political pressure.

74.   Countries of immigration will have to distinguish between genuine refugees and aspirational migrants who are seeking to improve their lives. Different legal status and varied strategies for coping with each challenge are required. Of course, governments will also continue to maintain a distinction between legal and illegal migration.

75.   NATO member countries should provide ample support to those so-called frontline states in the MENA region which are hosting large numbers of refugees and migrants who have fled conflict. Lebanon, for example, is perched on the edge of state failure; yet it hosts hundreds of thousands of refugees. The situation is unsustainable, and essential support and more equitable burden sharing is needed.

76.   Tough decisions will have to be made regarding the provision of humanitarian support to vulnerable communities in societies ruled by governments hostile to NATO. This is nowhere more apparent today than in Afghanistan, where millions are currently facing starvation and could soon begin to take flight. It is doubtless a national tragedy that the Taliban now rules that country, but efforts are needed to ease the burdens on a traumatised and deprived population which soon could feel compelled to flee the country and precipitate another migration crisis. The same logic applies to Syria.

77.   NATO should continue to energise its partnerships with partners in its southern neighbourhood while promoting capacity building and resilience. Such efforts can contribute to regional stability which, in turn, can help ameliorate some of the conditions that drive migration (de Maizière et al., 2020). Continued investments in capacity building and training such as the NATO Mission Iraq would also be helpful in this regard (Sur, 2019).

78.   We need to work on a solution for the problem of illegal migration and the lack of return of asylum seekers who did not receive international protection, in cooperation with all MENA countries.

79.   NATO Allies need to upgrade all diplomatic efforts to stabilize Libya. This has to be one of the priorities for our Western Alliance.

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