



Why Europe needs legal migration and how to sell it

by Camino Mortera-Martinez and Beth Oppenheim

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European leaders should make a more forceful case for legal migration pathways into the European Union and better integration of migrants who have arrived, rather than just focusing on closing borders and repatriation. That is the key message from a new Centre for European Reform (CER) paper, '[Why Europe needs legal migration and how to sell it](#),' which looks at how politicians can push back against the populist and nationalist narrative about immigration in Europe.

The number of migrants coming in to Europe has fallen sharply since the height of the migration crisis in 2015, yet the issue remains a major political battleground. This is likely to remain the case before and long after the European Parliament elections in 2019. Migration to the EU is inevitable: the bloc's relative prosperity means it will remain an attractive destination for migrants seeking a better life for years to come. Migration has the capacity to be positive-sum, giving migrants an opportunity to improve their circumstances while providing more workers and tax revenue for host countries. But unless policy-makers go beyond simply pulling up the draw-bridge, they will be playing into the populists' hands.

The EU has made significant progress on curbing and returning irregular arrivals, but it must do better at providing managed entry routes for migrants whose skills are needed and improve integration. European leaders should articulate a nuanced case for legal migration, setting out the benefits of bringing migrants in while also acknowledging the challenges involved. The EU may never agree a common system for accepting migrants, but it should support projects by member-states with countries outside the bloc, including initiatives which open migration pathways for workers from third countries in conjunction with funding for training of programmes.

"European leaders need to stop pretending that migration can be stopped. It can't, and it shouldn't. If they want to beat the populists, they need to be honest with their voters: migration needs to be mutually beneficial for the migrant and the host society, or it will threaten the liberal fabric of the European Union," said Camino Mortera-Martinez, a senior research fellow at the CER and co-author of the paper.

"European migration policy has fallen hostage to populism. Leaders must reject policies of pure containment, and powerfully articulate the case for opening legal migration channels," said co-author Beth Oppenheim, a researcher at the CER.

Note to editors:

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