

At the core of the ENP: political dialogue, trade and mobility

The fourth block of the EuroMeSCo Euromed Survey aimed to assess elements such as political dialogue, trade and mobility, which have been at the core of the ENP during the past 20 years. It delved in questions on policy revision and restructuring.

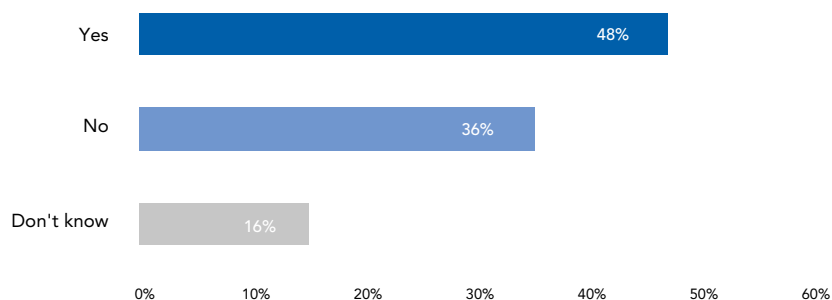
Main findings:

- Almost half of the SMCs respondents answered favourably when asked if the Action Plans and Partnership Priorities reflected their country's needs and challenges.
- When assessing if Action Plans and Partnership Priorities reflected country needs and challenges there is a clear trend that differentiates Mashreq and Maghreb countries. Largely positive responses from the former and a differing, more nuanced outlook from the latter.
- At the regional level, 41% of overall respondents considered that needs and challenges were not reflected in the Partnership Priorities. There was a breakdown of consensus here where EU respondents maintained a negative perception at the regional level, while Southern respondents were more positive.
- Most respondents were in favour of maintaining a regular calendar for political dialogue between the EU and its partners, under the banner of the ENP. Strong support was also given to introducing more flexibility into the scheduling of these meetings.
- 36% of those polled considered that the change introduced in 2015, regarding progress reports, was unfortunate, and that the EU should keep issuing reports regarding "progress" made by its partners. 26% indicated that they didn't know.

- DCFTAs are still considered the best paradigm to advance trade relations between the EU and its Southern Mediterranean partners.
- There is no clear answer as to whether the South should continue pushing for signing agreements, as has been (unsuccessfully) the case, or define a new approach for mobility cooperation.

Question 8 aimed to investigate whether the ENP was focusing on the real needs, challenges and priorities of countries involved. Forming the background of this question were bilateral negotiations, especially financial assistance, that focused on partner action plans (until 2015) and partner priorities (since 2015). The first question only asked Southern Mediterranean partners (SMP) to respond and wanted to know about the specific impact on the respondent's country. Almost half of the respondents (graph 16) believed that the Action Plans and Partnership Priorities reflected their country's needs and challenges.

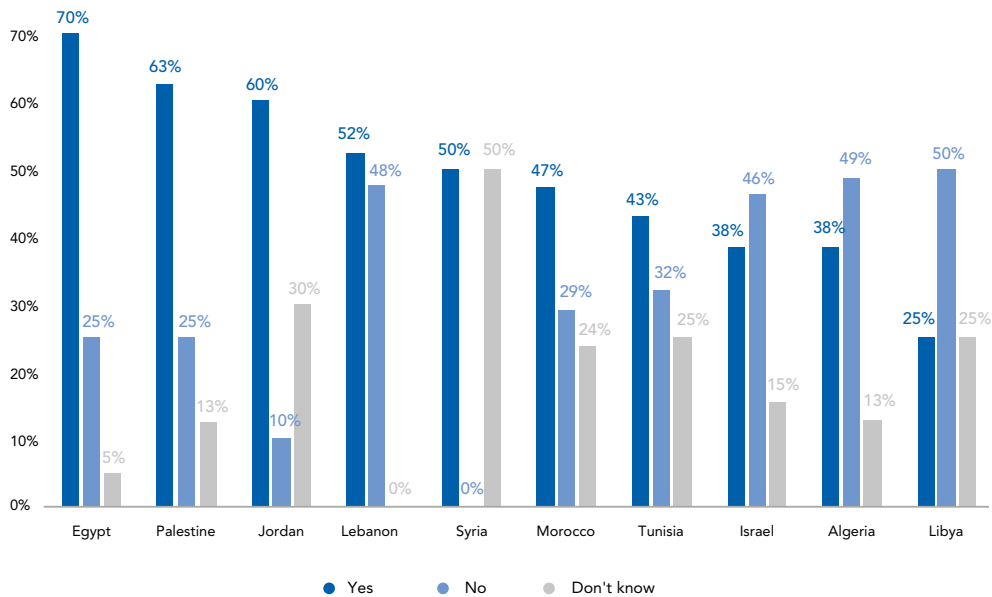
Graph 16: Q.8a Do you think the Priorities for Action/Partnership Priorities identified in these documents reflect the real needs, challenges, and priorities of your country? (only SMP respondents)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14th Euromed Survey

When analysing the results by country there is a clear trend that differentiates the Mashreq and Maghreb. 'Yes' answers were above 50% in Egypt, Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon (graph 17) while percentages were below 50% in Maghreb countries and Israel. In certain cases, such as Algeria and Libya, as well as in Israel, respondents believed that the real needs and challenges of their countries were not prioritised in the ENP Partnership Priorities (or equivalent Action Plans).

Graph 17: Q.8a Do you think the Priorities for Action/Partnership Priorities identified in these documents reflect the real needs, challenges, and priorities of your country? (only SMP respondents)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14th Euromed Survey

Many of the comments offered different areas for improvement that the ENP could prioritise:

The entire vision of the southern flank's priorities needs to be re-assessed. The protest movements, COVID-19 crisis and ongoing geopolitical shifts must be taken into consideration.

— Algerian respondent

In Morocco the priorities only partly reflect the real needs and challenges. Possibly, there is a problem in impact evaluation. I'm not sure if the impact of the sponsored projects has been evaluated as rigorously and as strictly as it should have been.

— Moroccan respondent

It surprises me that these are the "real" needs in these countries. This may be what the EU thinks is real. How is it that none of these countries need food security, respect for sovereignty or independence? The EU should clarify that these are the priorities of its ruling partners; people have different needs.

— Tunisian respondent

All of these are important, but going forward, international trade should be a priority. It should be addressed from different perspectives, as international trade can pose opportunities to all the relevant stakeholders but at the same time it comes with its own set of challenges.

— Lebanese respondent

While they may not always perfectly capture every aspect of the Palestinian context, these documents are designed to provide a framework for targeted and effective EU support that aligns with Palestine's development aspirations. Ongoing dialogue and flexibility are key to ensuring that these priorities remain relevant and responsive to changing circumstances.

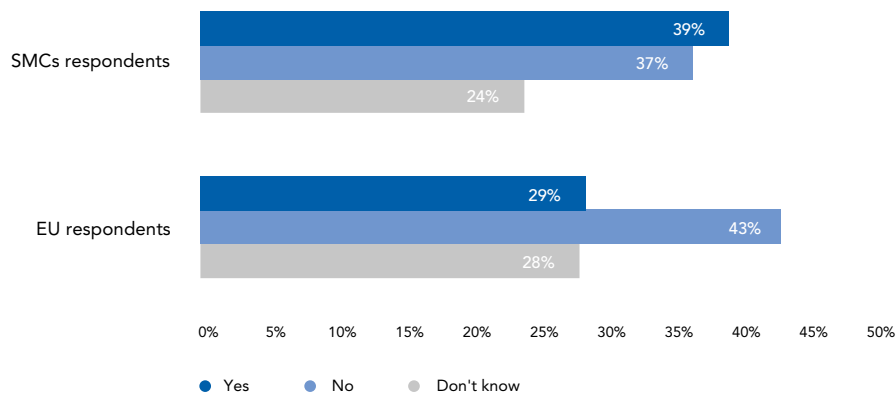
— Palestinian respondent

Effort should be more carefully directed towards specific and important sectors, whilst also being increased. It needs to focus on youth, poverty, job creation, food and water security, education, mobility and exchanging experiences and best practices in different sectors.

— Egyptian respondent

Question 8b proposed the same question but opened it up to all respondents and asked if, at the regional level, Partnership Priorities reflected the real needs, challenges and priorities of the countries involved. 41% of respondents considered that their needs and challenges were not reflected in the Partnership Priorities, while 32% considered that they were reflected. 28% did not have a clear idea and chose the 'Don't know' option. Breaking down the results by geographical area, graph 18 offers us a different picture. EU respondents were markedly negative in their views, while those from the SMCs were marginally more positive than negative.

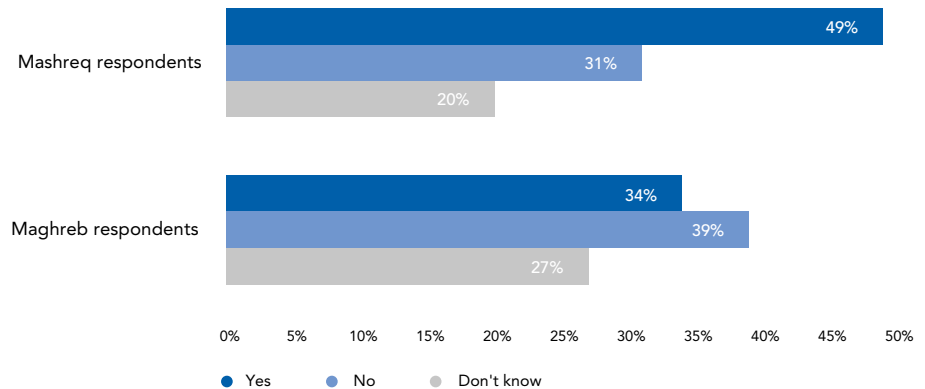
Graph 18: Q.8b At a regional level, do you think the Partnership Priorities reflect the real needs, challenges, and priorities of the countries involved? (all respondents)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14th Euromed Survey

Interestingly, the positive results of SMCs respondents were due to Mashreq answers as 49% considered that Partnership Priorities reflect their real needs and challenges, while 31% considered that they do not. Maghreb respondents, on the contrary, highlighted that for them, there is no correspondence between priorities and their real needs and challenges (39%). Only 34% of those polled believed that there has been relevant prioritisation.

Graph 19: Q.8b At a regional level, do you think the Partnership Priorities reflect the real needs, challenges, and priorities of the countries involved? (all respondents)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14th Euromed Survey

These are some open comments on how Partnership Priorities reflect real needs and challenges at the regional level:

The Partnership Priorities are much better focused on the priorities of the two sides (EU and partner countries). Despite this, the tendency to a dispersion of efforts is a constant challenge.

— Irish respondent

The big issues are migration and refugees. In terms of politics, it is sometimes deplorable to see how far the EU is from doing what needs to be done.

— Lebanese respondent

If the EU decided to take a real stand on human rights in authoritarian countries it would not be able to sign Partnership Priority documents with their governments. I don't see this happening, because the partners have the EU over a barrel on the migration issue. So, the Partnership Priorities are good for governments, less so for societies. The question is the extent to which the EU can live with this.

— German respondent

Other comments on Partnership Priorities described some elements that, according to respondents, should be present at the regional level:

Europe needs to define its own interests in order to explain priorities to its partners. The EU may need to address why other models (Russian or Chinese) are working within the region.

— Spanish respondent

Priorities should be developed in direct consultation with civil society, grassroots groups, NGOs and later with governments.

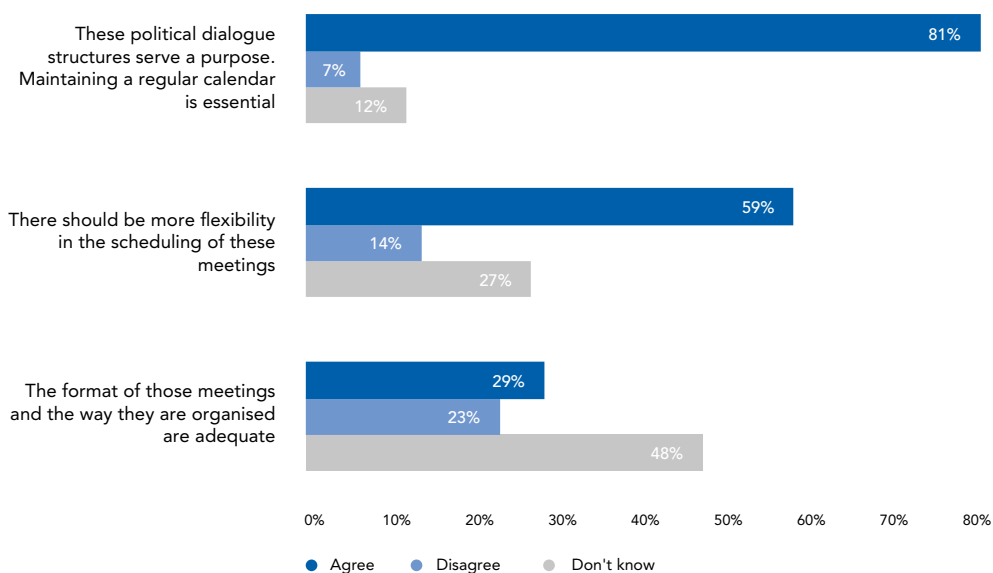
— Palestinian respondent

Security support is insufficient (Morocco is the first African border of the European Union), hence there is a need for better collaboration (return migration, legal migration, human rights, support for the diaspora, etc.).

— Moroccan respondent

Questions 9 and 10 were focused on two specific tools related to the functioning of the ENP. The first, in **question 9**, was focused on the articulation of the political and policy dialogue of the EU with its partners under the ENP. Respondents clearly agree on maintaining present dialogue structures and its calendar (81% of the answers), although strong support was also given to increasing flexibility when scheduling these meetings (59%). When asked to evaluate if the format of the meetings and their organisation are adequate, 48% of respondents answered, 'Don't know'. While almost one third believed they were adequate, 23% did not (graph 20).

Graph 20: Q.9 Do you agree/disagree with these statements?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14th Euromed Survey

More qualitative opinions were outlined in the opened commentaries:

The meetings are highly bureaucratic in nature. Making them more operational is a constant challenge, reflecting the weight of the bureaucracies that confront each other in these meetings.

— Irish respondent

On the one hand regular meetings at official and ministerial level can help to maintain a good momentum, or at least force officials and politicians to keep their finger on the proverbial pulse and measure the progress of relations. Yet routine meetings may not stimulate new ideas and initiatives. Perhaps the EU should differentiate between routine official level meetings and special ministerial level meetings to initiate new initiatives. It may give politicians a stimulus to initiate steps towards the EU.

— Israeli respondent

Although the calendar should be maintained, the EU is not sufficiently perceived as a political player because it has no teeth and competes against its own member states. Thus, these meetings look more like consultations.

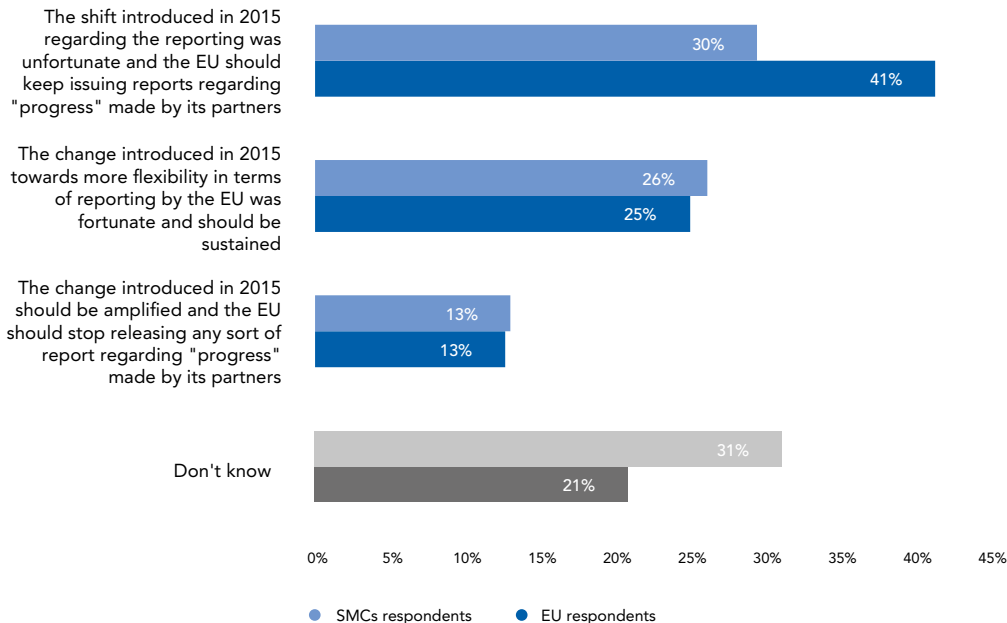
— Lebanese respondent

Diversity in participation should be available at all meetings. Where possible, the meetings should be accessible (e.g., as a webcast) to members of the public and civil society organisations in all the respective countries.

— Turkish respondent

Question 10 focused on the practice of reporting the progress of agreed policies between the EU and its ENP partners. In 2015 the reporting framework changed from a model of a set of regular progress reports on all countries, towards a less prescriptive style of assessment. 36% believed indeed it was unfortunate and thought that the EU should keep issuing reports regarding "progress" made by its partners. On the other hand, 24% thought it was a good change. EU respondents were more critical of the new reporting framework (graph 21).

Graph 21: Q.10 When the ENP was crafted in 2004, it was established that the European Commission would "report periodically on progress accomplished" towards agreed priorities. With the 2015 review of the ENP, this systematic model of annual progress reports changed. Since then, there is no standardized practice of reporting. Do you think that (select only one option):



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14th Euromed Survey

In the open comments some respondents elaborated on their answers:

It is necessary to have evaluation tools but in reality, they are only interesting if they are accompanied by a real political analysis and proposals for action by EU countries to promote a climate of confidence.

— French respondent

It is important to have some kind of regular evaluation, such a document can be used to build upon. It does not need to be done annually, it could be, for example, every two years. Clarity should be key in the document: the way it is written, who participated in it, what are its purposes, and how it can be useful and applied. These, among other questions, should be clarified.

— Egyptian respondent

It is essential to provide more transparency and accountability in EU policy. The EU should go back to the process of regular reporting (maybe not annually, but bi-annually).

— Polish respondent

If the ENP aims to promote not only a partnership but a co-ownership of the programme, EU reporting should follow different MS approaches and even regional aggregations, becoming even more flexible.

— Italian respondent

Regular reporting is good, as are standards for that reporting. It's treated by many low-level embassy staff/diplomats as a pain but it forces a regular review of policy and impact, and keeps these standards at the forefront of the minds of implementing officers, which is useful.

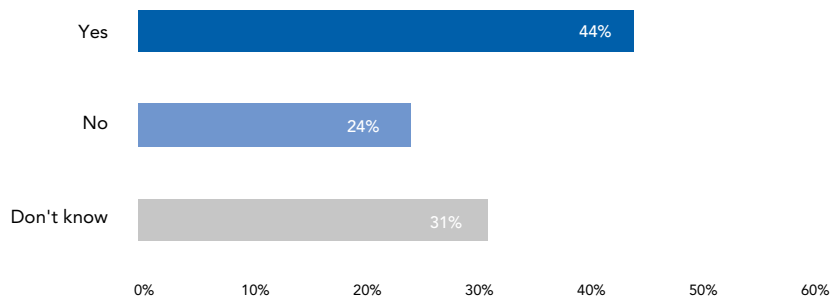
— Libyan respondent

This question conflates two issues: regular reporting, which in my view should be maintained also with respect to transparency towards EU citizens; and reporting framed in terms of "progress", which examines partner countries in terms of how they meet expectations and priorities overwhelmingly shaped by the EU. In my view, regular reporting should happen, but it should focus on more general developments, rather than becoming an exercise on how virtuous or otherwise ENP partner countries are.

— Italian respondent

In **question 11**, participants of the survey were asked about the deep comprehensive free trade areas (DCFTAs), since trade integration has been a key objective of ENP. DCFTAs, essentially free-trade zones with access to the EU Single Market, have been implemented by the EU in the Eastern Neighbourhood since 2014, but the signature of similar agreements has not been possible with its Southern neighbours. When asked if DCFTAs are still the best paradigm to advance better trade relations between the EU and its Southern Mediterranean partners, 44% of respondents stated that they are (graph 22). A notable 31% chose 'Don't know' while a quarter were unconvinced by the DCFTAs.

Graph 22: Q.11 Do you think DCFTAs are still the best paradigm to advance better trade relations between the EU and its Southern Mediterranean partners?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14th Euromed Survey

In the open-ended comments respondents identified some alternative options:

Comprehensive free trade agreements are considered a form of integration in the global economy and one of the modern means of cooperation between countries. They create blocs that can coexist and cope with global economic changes.

— Algerian respondent

DCFTA was tailored to specific countries (Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) which are distinct to Southern Mediterranean countries. The general principle may perhaps hold but adaptation will be needed.

— Spanish respondent

DCFTAs applicability to the Southern Mediterranean region may require careful consideration. The EU should assess the unique circumstances and challenges of its Southern neighbours and adapt its approach accordingly. Customised agreements, development-oriented strategies, and inclusivity in the negotiation process could offer alternative paths to foster better trade relations and support economic growth and stability in the region.

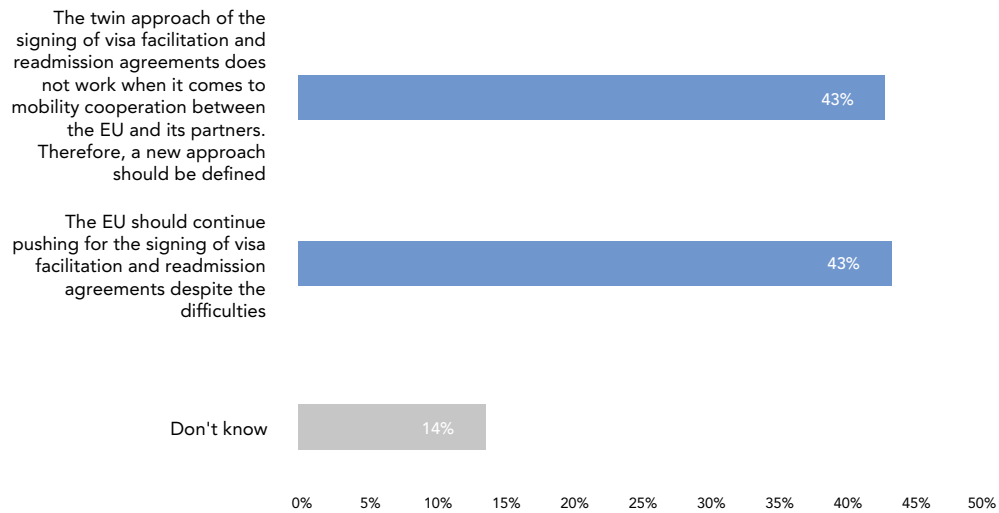
— Lebanese respondent

I would prefer to say 'probably' but this depends on how the EU approaches this issue. The DCFTA negotiations have run into a wall because the EU remains committed to limiting access in sectors where the partners have comparative advantages. This is a political decision and there are reasons for it. But as long as this is the case the DCFTA will not go ahead.

— German respondent

Question 12 was focused on mobility. The EU has concluded visa liberalisation and signed visa facilitation and readmission agreements with almost all its Eastern neighbours, but contrary to the Eastern Partnership, visa liberalisation is not on the agenda with any Southern neighbours and the twin track approach visa facilitation/readmission agreements has not prospered either. The survey addressed two options related to visa facilitation and readmission. Respondents did not show a clear preference towards either alternative. The same percentage was given to "Continue pushing for signing agreements" (43%) as for "Defining a new approach to mobility cooperation" (graph 23).

Graph 23: Q.12 Given this situation, do you think that (select only one option):



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 14th Euromed Survey

In the open comments the challenges of finding a balanced policy on readmissions and visa facilitation were highlighted by respondents:

What is striking is that the European Union does not hide its intentions in trying to persuade the countries concerned to accept its policy directions in the field of combating illegal immigration. It is also open about its political orientation in the field of facilitating visas. The two policies are selective.

— Algerian respondent

The question of readmission requires far more leverage than what can be achieved with visa facilitation. The range of measures to elicit real cooperation on readmission should be expanded to include “sanctions” as well as “rewards”. At the same time the insistence on the readmission of 3rd country nationals is unfair on the transit countries and should be dealt with differently.

— Irish respondent

The EU approach is seen by many Southern countries as a method to solve its migration problem without due regard to the concerns of Southern countries. A new approach must be just and balanced.

— Egyptian respondent

A new approach could focus more on education and training linked to visa facilitation in order to tackle irregular migration flows. After a positive result in that direction, readmission agreements could be tackled.

— Italian respondent