Reflection paper

The actor of my policy brief is a fictitious think tank specialising on European migration policy. There are several similar think tanks: The Migration Policy Group, the Migration Policy Institute, the Migration Policy Centre, and the European Stability Initiative. Similar to these organisations, my think tank is based in Brussels in close proximity to the European Parliament where it aims to influence policymakers' decision-making by providing information on current problems and possible solution strategies. This is done through publications, panel discussions, events, and as exemplified in this case, through policy briefs.

Policy briefs can be distinguished between objective briefs and advocacy briefs (FAO, 2011, p.143). The former gives balanced information on a certain issue and presents the reader with different policy options while the latter provides arguments and evidence in favour of a specific course of action. I have chosen an advocacy brief as it is more reflective of the current publications by think tanks in the field which are often driven by a certain set of values and largely fixed on one political orientation (Oxford University Careers Service, 2021). My fictitious think tank is providing a brief overview of the continuing refugee crisis at European borders and proposes a 6-step plan to address the issue.

The policy brief is structured as recommended by FAO (2011, p.144). It starts off by introducing the issue and providing background information on current refugee crises. Subsequently, it convinces the reader that the problem must be addressed urgently. Lastly, it gives clear recommendations for one particular course of action to manage the crisis and stimulates the reader, i.e. policymaker, to implement it. The policy brief has a professional layout and features two visualisations, a bar graph showing the rising number of global refugees and a map of the most common migration routes. Except for the map (source: HRW, 2015), the policy brief has been designed from scratch including the graph, layout, and logo. The sources for the information provided are international institutions (UNHCR, 2021; IOM, 2021; European Commission, 2021; Miles and Nebehay, 2017), NGOs (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2019; Mannocchi, 2019; Tondo, 2020) as well as newspaper articles from The Guardian (Tondo and Sheehy, 2021) and The New York Times (Stevis-Gridneff and Pronczuk, 2020, p.18). For space reasons, a bibliography is not provided on the 2-page brief.

The policy brief features some of the current EU Commission's proposals in the 'New Pact on Migration and Asylum' (European Commission, 2020) and aspects of past policies such as the EU-Turkey Agreement from 2016, but goes beyond them and introduces new ideas aimed to reduce human suffering and costs for EU member states. It is critical of some aspects of the current European policy, e.g., the slow processing of asylum applications, while mostly staying within the current discourse. At its core, it proposes a new mechanism that provides refugees with a viable and safe legal immigration process to Europe by allowing asylum and work visa applications from non-EU territory. At the same time, it discourages the crossing of the Medi-

terranean Sea as migrants declared "not in need for protection" are deported more quickly. Together these policies could prevent future deaths and simultaneously save costs for EU member states by reducing welfare expenses for refugees awaiting a response to their asylum application, increasing tax revenues as arriving refugees and migrants can be employed immediately (Bahar, 2018), reducing the number of expensive deportations (Leerkes and Van Houte, 2020), and most importantly, avoiding images of large, uncontrolled migrant caravans that have fuelled right-wing parties across the EU and Britain (Farage, 2018). By addressing these interests of policymakers—reducing financial and political costs—and building on existing frameworks, the policy brief is set to capture interest from decision-makers in Brussels.

However, by staying within the mainstream narrative around refugees and migration policy, the policy brief displays serious limitations. First, it purports a view of refugees being costly for the host country despite empirical evidence that migrants are good for economies (Maxmen, 2018). This is underpinned by a language that diminishes human experiences of refugees by referring to them as a "wave" and showing aggregated data in large bar plots which makes the arrival of refugees seem threatening and dangerous. Furthermore, borders are not seen as a zone in which the state exercises its control as Longo (2017, p.49) has argued, but merely as a line to be crossed. Second, by ignoring the historical context, it creates a "veil of ignorance" (Danewid, 2017) that ignores the West's complicity in many sources of displacement and, instead, portrays it as a bystander. It perpetuates the production of race through bordering practices which are encouraged in the policy proposal as a way to arrive at an "orderly process" (de Noronha, 2019, p.2427). Third, the policy proposals are aiming to mitigate refugee movements which are only the symptom of wider crises that the brief leaves unaddressed. Fourth, if executed the policies would require controversial cooperation with and funding for regimes that violate human rights—something the EU has been criticised for since its €6 billion agreement with Turkey (HRW, 2016).

In conclusion, the policy brief proposes an alternative EU refugee policy that, in my view, would be better than its current insofar that it would be safer and more equal for refugees, providing legal pathways to safety. However, it suffers from serious limitations symptomatic for many of the EU's current migration policies and does not go 'outside the box'. This exemplifies a larger trend in policy think tanks which try to appeal to policymakers by adopting their language and the contemporary discourse around migration which I have tried to highlight in this project.

(951 words)

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