

Report from the Fourth Online MMP Meeting
Migration Management and Lived Realities

The fourth and final meeting of the Mutual Mentorship Program (MMP26) before the summer break was held virtually on 18 June 2026, under the theme “*Migration Management and Lived Realities*”. This session brought together mentors from across Europe and the MENA region to learn more about the topic of migration management and share reflections on the border theme of migration.

Ann Måwe, Director of SDI, opened the session by reflecting on the recent in-person meeting in Stockholm. She highlighted the value of feedback, shared learning, and the importance of continued engagement in light of recent regional developments, including early steps toward a peace agreement, trade reopening, recovery and reconstruction, alongside ongoing negotiations on the nuclear file.

She introduced the main topic of the discussion, migration, emphasizing its strong connection to lived experiences in both regions and its impact on societies and everyday life. She noted that migration remains a central element of EU–MENA dialogue, including within the Pact for the Mediterranean, where it is addressed under security, preparedness and migration management.

Interactive activity

Two MMP pairs shared reflections from their one-on-one discussions on migration management and lived realities, drawing on their practical experience. They emphasized the importance of a human-centered perspective, highlighting the personal stories and challenges behind migration. The discussion underscored the key role of local communities and civil society in promoting understanding, inclusion, and a more human approach to migration.

Experts’ Panel Discussion

Four speakers were then invited to share their reflections on migration

- **Justin MacDermott**, *Deputy Regional Director Operations in the Middle East and North Africa Regional Office, IOM*
- **Kelly Petillo**, *Programme Manager, Middle East and North Africa | European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)*
- **Balkees Khalifah Mgadami**, *Practitioner with experience supporting refugees and migrants in Libya, NL Embassy, MMPer*
- **Martha Gillberg**, *Migration and peacebuilding practitioner with experience linked to refugee reception and integration*

From his side, **Justin Dermott** focused on clarifying the legal and operational foundations of migration governance. He explained the distinctions between refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants, emphasizing that these categories are defined by international law, particularly the 1951 Refugee Convention. He stressed that all



migrants, regardless of their legal status, are entitled to fundamental human rights and protection. Drawing on the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) work, he highlighted the importance of governments balancing policy objectives with operational realities by strengthening border management, protecting vulnerable migrants, addressing displacement, facilitating safe migration pathways, and improving cooperation across migration routes.

Meanwhile, in the context of the European Union's Pact on Migration and Asylum, **Kelly Pettilo** discussed its approach to migration externalization, particularly its partnerships with countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. She noted that while cooperation between the EU and neighboring countries remains important, many current agreements appear to be shaped significantly by domestic considerations. She raised concerns that such arrangements may not always fully account for human rights implications, the broader governance contexts of partner countries, or the need to address the underlying drivers of migration. **Pettilo** also observed that migration routes tend to adapt in response to enforcement measures, which in some cases can limit the effectiveness of country specific agreements. She concluded that the EU could benefit from a more balanced and comprehensive approach, one that complements migration management with stronger protection frameworks, expanded legal pathways, and longer-term solutions alongside external cooperation and border measures.

Key Recommendations from the panel discussion

- **Strengthen policy dialogue on rights-based migration governance**
Deepen dialogue between the EU, MENA partners, and other stakeholders to ensure that migration policies and cooperation frameworks are grounded in international human rights standards and protection principles.
- **Promote balanced and mutually beneficial partnerships**
Support dialogue and cooperation that reflect shared priorities, local ownership, and mutual accountability, moving beyond a narrow focus on migration control towards broader development addressing root-causes and protection objectives.
- **Expand safe and regular migration pathways**
Increase opportunities for regular migration, including labour mobility, family reunification, and resettlement, as part of a comprehensive approach to managing migration and enhancing protection.
- **Strengthen coherence between policy commitments and practice**
Foster evidence-based dialogue that helps align political commitments, operational realities, and available resources, while strengthening learning and accountability.

Break-out group discussion

Participants were divided into small groups to discuss one key tension between migration management policies and the lived realities of migrants, and to reflect on its implications for EU–MENA cooperation.

Concluding remarks



Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa

Looking ahead, the second in-person gathering will take place in Amman on 28–29 September. Participants will receive further information in advance and will be invited to propose thematic areas for discussion during the upcoming meetings.

This final in-person gathering will be followed by an online meeting in October, and subsequently by SDI's Annual November Conference. The conference is expected to host over 150 participants and will bring together stakeholders from government, NGOs, civil society organizations, and the private sector.