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Migration: One of the Most Important Challenges for Europe

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Purpose

This brief presents major social, technological, economic, environmental and political trends and rationales for migration, followed by a number of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of migratory processes. In the last section, the brief concludes with a set of general policy options and some final remarks about the sources and data analysed.

Why Focus on Migration?

According to the 2003 Eurostat population reports, the European population growth at a level of less than 3% per year was only possible through net migration, which is restricted in most countries. A more recent European Commission report (2008) indicates that the natural population growth in the EU is becoming critical.

> *The average number of children per woman (the current fertility rate) is low, at 1.5 children for the EU-25, well below the replacement rate of 2.1 required to stabilise the population size in the absence of immigration. A limited increase of 1.6 is projected for the EU-25 by 2030* (p. 5).

Other European forecasts show that the EU population will continue to grow until approximately mid-2020s, after which population will decline steadily and fall to the current level before 2050. But this is not only a European problem, current United Nations forecasts show that the world population is expected to fall to 5.5 billion by 2100, that is, 1 billion fewer people than are alive today. These demographic trends will have several socio-economic implications in the future, for example, by 2050 it is expected that the EU will change from having four to only two persons of working age for each citizen aged 65 and above. In this context, the EU has become the recipient of some major inflows of net migration from third countries.

Some commentators present migration as a "quick fix" to the ageing population problem, while others explore a wider range of benefits of living in progressively more multicultural societies. This brief will discuss these issues but it will also include major trends related to the migration from rural to urban areas, and *vice versa*.

In so doing, the first section presents major social, technological, economic, environmental and political trends and rationales for migration, followed by a number of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of migratory processes. The brief concludes with a set of policy options and some final remarks about the future of migration in the EU.

Analysing EFMN Documents

A selection of available foresight and futures studies in English has been made. A total of 160 studies has been collected and selected out of the EFMN database. These were studies with different backgrounds, scopes, themes, horizons and scales. These PDF files were then converted into txt files.

With the semantic data mining tool "TextAnalyst" these text files were analysed. First, out of the 160 studies a small number of relevant studies was selected that had titles strongly related to the researched topic. The TextAnalyst analysed these texts and found the most relevant keywords and semantic relations between the most important words. These words were collected into a key word list for the researched

topic. This list of keywords was used to analyse all 160 selected studies. The TextAnalyst yielded all sentences in which each of the keywords was present, with an additional hyperlink in the Text file to see the context in which the sentence occurred. The TextAnalyst also gave a semantic relation between the searched keywords and other words. With this relationship the list of keywords could be further enriched. The summary of sentences that contained one or more words from the list of keywords was manually read in the original

context and if the sentence or the section in which the sentence occurred was regarded as providing new or additional information, this section has been copied into a word file. In order to avoid the extreme out of the context copying of sentences, statements that were part of a scenario description were not copied into the word file. After the analysis of 160 studies a word file was created containing sections out of the original studies with information related to the selected topic and the reference to the original document.

Major Trends and Rationales

In terms of social trends and rationales, ageing population is often presented as "the main justification" for welcoming immigrants into the EU. But in some countries (especially in northern Europe), ageing has also generated a new type of migration from urban to rural areas.

Elderly on Top

Figures of a gradually more ageing and stagnating EU, mainly because of an increase in life expectancy and lower fertility rates, have indeed put socio-economic activities for the elderly on top of policy-makers agendas and have made migration into the EU a major focus of attention.

From Rural to Urban Areas and vice versa

However, with forecasts showing that more than half of the world's population will be urban by 2015, it makes sense to consider both the rural and urban aspects of migration. For example, it is possible to observe different types of migration between social classes. The rich are often moving to rural (or peri-urban) areas which are environmentally pleasant, less violent and healthier, while the poor tend to migrate to bigger cities or urban areas where they can find more job and education opportunities.

Translational Networks

Traditionally, research on migration has focused on two distinct trajectories: assimilation and ethnic pluralism. Now there is a third trajectory called translational networks. This focuses on the commercial and institutional relations and continuous exchanges immigrants have had between the countries of origin and the countries of settlement. These translational networks can be seen as the basis for translational social spaces in which collective identities overlap the boundaries of nations and states. Other social rationales for migration relate to key values such as tolerance (including political and religion). These together with techno-economic rationales (described below) have made various EU countries key target destinations for millions of immigrants in the last decades. For instance, in 2007 the net migration in the EU27 surpassed 1.6 million people and four countries alone (Spain, Italy, UK and France) received 80% of these migrations (see

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu). In any case, the net migration is heavily influenced by the levels of economic development and migration policy of each individual country.

Impact of Technologies

Technological developments have also played an important role in accelerating and shaping migration patterns. For example, the innovative use of ICT to support new business models in the air transport industry (e.g. the emergence of budget airlines) has increased the mobility possibilities of low-skilled workers looking for higher salaries in Western Europe.

Migration to New Jobs

Several economic reasons have underpinned migration into and within the EU. Non-EU members are attracted by the higher quality of life (including job opportunities), open-mindedness and multiculturalism characteristic of Europe. However, migration within the EU is mainly due to the so-called industrial deficit, whereby management-level workers from Western Europe find better opportunities in Easter European countries and ICT professional from Eastern Europe find better salaries in Western Europe.

Environmental Drivers

Infections diseases, water scarcity and food shortages have been the classic environmental drivers of migration from developing countries. Unfortunately this list has been expended to include the broader effects of climate change and pollution.

Political Drivers

Among the political trends affecting migration within Europe, the EU enlargement process is probably the most influential one. The increasing integration of the EU is bringing more cultures into closer contact with each other. This adds to a long tradition of cultural interchange, sometimes harmonious, sometimes with more friction.

Search for Ethical Values

Finally, we should consider changes in values as potential contributors to a new type of "ethical" migration. This migration assumes that life in the world (as conceived in the 19th and 20th centuries) should no longer be aimed at the

accumulation of wealth, wild consumption, experimenting of anarchical freedom or listening to distorted mass media. Instead, the ethical migrants of the 21st century are constantly looking for the meaning of the life rather than wealth,

promoting sustainable consumption, sharing global concerns for human development (peace, welfare and education) and promoting an alternative world opinion based on the critical mind of educated citizens.

Major SWOTs

This section lists some of the major strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of migratory processes in the EU.

Strengths

- Both low- and high-skilled migrants help the EU to improve economic growth, technological innovation and living conditions.
- New forms of "translational exchange" (see above), reciprocity and solidarity based on immigrants' kindness are typical strengths, especially among the first-generation labour immigrants and refugees (e.g. in the form of business contacts, homeland-oriented voluntary associations and political organisations).

Weaknesses

- There are unrestricted and large-scale migrations across national borders within the European Union, induced by severe environmental conditions.
- A major challenge facing the future of European democracy is intertwined with its demographic development and how its economic prosperity develops in the regions around Europe.
- Migration to the cities will increase population density and put more pressure on the access to resources like water.
- There is a negative effect of the departure of skilled people from their countries of origin.
- Immigrants often establish very close and isolated minority groups around culture and/or religion.

Threats

- Until around 2020 the share of persons aged more than 60 is expected to continue to increase at the present or a higher rate.
- If demographic forecasts prove accurate and the EU does not open its borders to migration, Europe will loose its power of renewal. However, the possibility of having too many migrants with a low birth rate could postpone the ageing process but not fundamentally change the demographic structure in Europe and may lead to serious instabilities.
- Restrictive migration policies with non-EU countries may increase controls at the external borders of the EU thus creating bottlenecks for freight transport and a decrease of transport efficiency.

- It might be difficult to achieve the sufficient number of young educated people, even with the support of positive migration flows.
- The prospects for the poorest people may not improve fast enough to prevent the acceleration of their migrations.
- The lack of water due to the pollution of aquifers, the increase in urbanisation and an increase of water consumption may be the origin of a new wave of migrations. In addition, a few countries controlling the water sheds might create conflicts (40% of humanity lives on international watersheds). The UN estimates that by 2050 more than 2 billion people will live in water scarce areas. However, water scarcity is not a problem in Western Europe except in the south (see http://www.acunu.org/millennium/ch-02.html).
- The migration of people from damaged areas to more environmentally stable areas seem inevitable and might lead to a series of conflicts and calls for less democratic means to keep order.
- It is not unreasonable to expect more economic migration in the future than in the past and this might increase the hostility towards the immigrants.
- Migration flows could widespread diseases.

Opportunities

- Migration can be, at least in part, a solution for the ageing population.
- Migration from Western to Eastern Europe (especially management-level workers and young ICT professionals) will help filling the skills deficit in the information-based economy.
- A reversal in the ageing population in Europe is not expected after 2020 but a slow down is possible.
- Europe can renew its population by increasing birth rate to its former level, by opening borders to immigrants or by doing both.
- Better understand the link between democracy and citizenship.
- Need to find strategies to manage diversity; especially in contexts where there are second generations of immigrants (the offspring's of former immigrants) and improve the understanding of integration in the long run.
- Globalisation will increase the community labour.
- Immigration and recruitment of experts from other countries will transform workplaces into multicultural communities.
- Service providers will have to gain a greater insight into various cultural factors, which poses a major competence challenge.

- Countries that encourage the immigration of working age people increase their labour supply and tax revenue and reduce the fiscal pressures associated to the ageing population of the country.

- Service providers can explore opportunities for new business models.

Major Policy Options

The previous discussions on major social, economic, environmental and political trends and the description of major SWOTs is complemented here with a wide range of policy options considered in recent foresight studies.

- The EU needs to build further decision processes at a National or European level to face problems related to "undesired" immigration.
- The EU needs to establish linkages among different policies such as migration, ethnic minorities and health.
- The EU needs to create and implement a strategic plan for a global partnership between rich and poor that combines the strengths of free markets with rules based on global ethics.
- The EU needs to establish communication channels to bring rural areas and rural population to the mainstream societal activities, in order to create a participating society and avoid exclusion.

- The EU needs a more proactive and assertive *immigration and asylum policy* given that, to date, it has been almost solely dependent on very-short term decisions taken in response to political pressures.

Final Remarks

This short brief has discussed major trends related to migration. For practical reasons, these trends have been grouped into social, technological, economic, environmental and political categories. Many trends could have been further elaborated to complement the SWOTs, however, for space reasons, only the most relevant ones have been considered. In any case, these trends and SWOTs are only some of the many elements contributing to the complexity "migratory processes" which are also affected by other regional, national, European and global trends.

The reader should also bear in mind that the proposed policy options result from the analysis of a literature review based on over 18 foresight exercises focused (or partiality interested) on migration issues.

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