

CHAPTER 5: The political economy of human mobility: crisis or opportunity?

Human mobility in general, and labour mobility in particular has been one of the principal objectives of the European integration project since its inception in 1958. The Single Market project has further facilitated mobility for the *nationals* of member states and has included policies such as social protection and access to social security in host countries for migrating workers. Whilst the EU enhanced its policies and rights for internal movement for its member state nationals, this is not the case for EU residents from outside the EU and even more so for non-EU migrants. Moreover, not all member states have agreed with EU level Regulations and Directives on cross border-welfare that has facilitated labour mobility. Given different levels of GDP per capita, standard of living and welfare provisions across member states, some in the richer EU states argue that ‘freedom of movement’ could lead to ‘welfare migration’ and ‘benefit tourism’, especially after the accession of poorer east European countries. In their letter of April 2013 the interior ministers of Austria, Britain, Germany and the Netherlands noted the risk of fraud in claiming social benefits and argued against unconditional free movement of people and access to social benefits.¹

The involvement of interior ministers, as the executive powers in charge of law and order, in this debate and their language of ‘welfare migration’ and ‘benefit tourism’ in relation to the free movement of EU nationals have set the tone for much of the public discourse on migration across EU, especially with regard to undocumented migration of people from outside the EU, refugees and those seeking asylum.

The discourse on immigration in Europe is laden with xenophobia, racism and untruths. Anti-immigrant politicians use metaphors in their narratives on migration to whip up public support for their inhumane migration policies. In her speech to the British Conservative party conference in 2023, the then British interior minister, Suella Braverman (who is of Indian descent), spoke of the current ‘hurricane’ of immigration and compared it with the gusty winds of change that took her parents across the globe in the 20th century.² Her metaphors are comparable to those of other mainly right-wing politicians across the EU who have talked about ‘invasion’, ‘great replacement’ of ‘European’ populations and cultures, etc. Such hyperboles, however, are not limited to the Right, as the German politician Sahra Wagenknecht has demonstrated with her talk

¹ Martinsen, D. S. (2020). Social Policy: Between legal integration and politicization. In H. Wallace, M. A. Pollack, A. R. Young, & C. Roederer-Rynning (Eds.), *Policy-making in the European Union* (8 ed., pp. 254-274). Oxford University Press.

² Political Speech Archive. Suella-Braverman-2023 Speech to Conservative Party Conference, October 3, 2023. Available at: <https://www.ukpol.co.uk/suella-braverman-2023-speech-to-conservative-party-conference/>

of the irresponsibility of allowing ‘massive immigration’ in the face of shortage of housing, teachers and day-care places.³ Such sentiments are widespread across the EU.

Yet, the facts of international migration tell a different and much less dramatic story. As far as the stock of migrants is concerned, according to the latest available figures in 2020 there were 281 million international migrants, defined as someone who lived in a country other than their country of birth. They comprised only 3.6% of the world population.⁴ As for the EU, in 2022 there were 23.8 million migrants from non-EU countries living in the EU, comprising 5.3% of the EU population of 447 million people. These numbers are hardly overwhelming, especially when we consider how the EU has managed the sudden influx of Ukrainian refugees following the Russia-Ukraine war. Currently there are about 4.1 million displaced Ukrainians living in the EU. The displaced Ukrainians have enjoyed a privileged position in being admitted to and living in the EU, compared with the EU acceptance of displaced people from non-European countries; the great majority of whom, contrary to public perceptions in the EU do not migrate to EU in the face of wars, social and ethnic conflict, natural disasters, etc. They move to the nearby safe places either within their own country or in neighbouring countries. According to the UN High Commission for Refugees, just under three quarters (75%) of refugees worldwide were hosted in their neighbouring countries with the least developing countries (Bangladesh, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Sudan, the Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda and Yemen) hosting 27% (6.7 million) of all global refugees.⁵

5.1. The EU management and regulation of migration

In the discourse on migration there is a tension between migration as a labour market issue and the migration of people. Labour is not like other goods, it is embodied in human beings with all its physical, gendered and cultural characteristics that are shaped by history, giving labour migration its political and cultural dimensions. *It is people who move in search of work or safety and offer their labour in different locations and contribute to a globalized labour market.* Yet this simple fact is often ignored in the debate on migration and reveals itself in: ‘we asked for labour but then people came’ or the use of the term ‘Gastarbeiter’ or ‘Guest worker’ in Germany that drew attention to their specific function as ‘workers’ and their temporary status as ‘guests’ to distinguish

³ Chazan, G (2023, October 23) New leftist anti-immigration party to challenge Germany’s far right, *Financial Times* Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/b18d8fee-b622-4e09-8865-4b200a62436c>.

⁴ International Organisation of Migration (2021). *World Migration Report 2022*. Available at: <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022>.

⁵ Ibid.

them from ‘migrants’ which implied not only long term commitment by migrants to the destination country, but also migrants rights, and responsibilities of the destination country for them. Moreover, immigration in the era of the nation-state has always raised the question of who is or can be a member of a nation. Small wonder that the labour market issues of the demand for labour (an economic matter) would be mixed with legal issues of border control and residence (a security and justicial affairs) with the latter being an issue of sovereignty.

These tensions have been reflected in the EU’s approach to the coordination of a common policy for managing and regulating migration from outside the EU under the ‘Common European Asylum System’ (CEAS).⁶ For example, the EU level– approach to policymaking gave way to trans-governmental or inter-governmental cooperation or coordination under the regulatory agencies of ‘Europol’ (for police cooperation), Frontex (for external border controls) or the European Asylum Support (for asylum). In short ‘security’ and ‘sovereignty’ have trumped ‘freedom’ and ‘justice’ in the EU’s objective of establishing ‘an area of freedom, security, and justice.’ ‘Member states have found it easier to agree on securitising the common external borders than on admitting migrants and refugees.’⁷ Agreement on the security of external borders resulted in the Frontex budget ballooning from €85 million in 2006, to €845 million in 2023.⁸ With regard to asylum seekers, the Dublin Convention on Asylum followed the Schengen Implementation Convention according to which the first country of entry of an asylum seeker has the responsibility to deal with the asylum claim. Such an approach paid no attention to the complexity and difficulty of *legal entry* into the Schengen countries for work, joining family, fleeing persecution and wars, etc. The wishes and voices of potential migrants have been absent in EU decisions. With the legal routes practically closed for thousands of people, a ‘market’ for the illegal routes of entry to the EU opened up, that in the aftermath of the US-led invasion of Iraq, the civil war in Syria, US-led attack on Libya and other foreign interventions and domestic repression in the MENA region and Afghanistan led to a sudden increase in the number of people trying to enter the EU via ‘front line’ countries like Greece, Italy and Spain.

It is remarkable that neither the Dublin Convention nor any EU institutions considered the capacity of the ‘front-line’ countries to deal with the sudden arrival of refugees and asylum seekers, despite the instabilities and presence of UN-managed refugee camps in

⁶ European Commission (2023). Migration and Home Affairs. *Common European Asylum System* [CEAS]. Available at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system_en

⁷ Lavenex, S. (2020). Justice and home affairs. In H. Wallace, M. A. Pollack, A. R. Young, & C. Roederer-Rynning (eds.), *Policy-making in the European Union* (8 ed., p. 344). Oxford University Press.

⁸ Eurostat (2023). *Migration and migrant population statistics*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics

the Mediterranean neighbourhood countries. Nor did the EU put the issue of the solidarity of EU member states and the need to support each other on the agenda. The recent reform of CEAS by the European Council introduces more restrictions on asylum seekers, encroaching on their rights. **'Its purpose is to shift asylum procedures to the external borders. [Under] a fast-track procedure ...people who come from countries with low acceptance-rates or who enter via 'safe third countries' may be summarily turned away. A large proportion of refugees will be affected by the extension of the third-country rules. Furthermore, an emergency decree will expand the scope of these rules, extend detention periods, and facilitate direct deportations.'**⁹

Thousands of migrants have paid with their lives for EU policies on migration and asylum, whilst some EU Schengen countries temporarily suspended the Schengen area border free travel arrangements during the peak periods of Syrian migrants arriving on Greek islands in the 2015-16 migration crisis. The very foundation of EU integration as a political entity was shaken, contributing further to Euro-scepticism within right-wing parties and their anti-immigration rhetoric and propaganda. It also made 'immigration' a major issue for the Brexit referendum in the UK.

5.2. The voice of migrants: the case of Senegal

The voice of non-EU migrants has been absent from migration studies and migration policy. Their voice could mostly be 'heard' in their music, dance, visual arts, literature, culinary tradition and in general in cultural forms which have enriched the European culture. The Opportunity research project ([opportunities - for a fair narrative on migration www.opportunitiesproject.eu](http://www.opportunitiesproject.eu)) was envisaged to fill this gap in valuing and understanding migrants view as expressed by them and their advocates (vicarious story telling). This section draws on one of the case studies of migrants' views (using 'cross-talk' methodology) and the place of migration in Senegalese culture.

Migration plays an important part in the socialisation of Senegalese people, as proverbs and songs are used to build the individual. Migration is a social fact and a social act. The desire to migrate has increased with the widespread use of social and mass media, television channels, etc. Through the magic of images, these television channels cultivate an attraction, an image of elsewhere that nurtures a culture of migration. In local discourse, returning migrants evoke an idyllic image of migration against a

⁹ Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (2023). *Is the CEAS Reform a Tipping Point?* Interview with C. Bünger, B. Kasperek and H. Schurian, H. Oct 23rd. Available at: <https://www.rosalux.eu/en/article/2316.is-the-ceas-reform-a-tipping-point.html>

backdrop of pride. This construction of identity, fed and maintained by returning migrants is at the root of a new 'way of life' characterised by new physical and linguistic expressions and new behaviours.

For would-be emigrants, the image of success abroad is in contrast to the reality at home which is suffering from chronic unemployment, job insecurity, idleness, lack of training, etc. This is particularly true of the fishing industry, whose income-generating potential has declined in recent years. People cite better living conditions as one of their main reasons for migration. Despite these adverse economic conditions Senegal does not feature in the top 20 emigration African countries. Its net migration, half of whom were women, was 1.6% of a total population of 16.7 million in 2020.¹⁰

Some migrants take the legal route thanks to the help of their relatives living in Europe who send them the necessary documents and money to obtain visa to travel by air to Europe. Others take the precarious and dangerous route to the Canary Islands in *pirogues* (a flat bottom large canoe) trying to land 'illegally' on Spanish shores, under the slogan 'Barça ou Barsaax' (Go to Barcelona or die). These journeys are either self-financed or financed by families, especially mothers in the case of young migrants, who sell their gold jewelry, other family assets, mortgage land, or borrow from saving association. These journeys are viewed as an investment in the future of family if migrants reach mainland Europe and start earning money and send back remittances, which according to IOM accounted for just over 10% of Senegal's GDP in 2020.¹¹

Not all migrants are successful but end in tragedy of dying in the perilous journey on the high seas or are repatriated to Senegal. The repatriated suffer a life of shame for their 'failure' and wasting of resources that finance them. However, for some families, repatriation is viewed as 'bad luck' and a motivation to 'try again.'

For the majority of Senegalese, the journey is not simply synonymous with acquiring a stable job, but symbolises the path to be taken to make one's fortune and acquire social prestige among one's peers. People say: 'migrating is not just about moving, it's about trying to exist in the eyes of your community.'

5.3. Towards a democratic migration policy and the settlement of migrants

¹⁰ International Organisation of Migration (2021). *World Migration Report 2022*. Available at: <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022>.

¹¹ Ibid.

The EU and its member states are in need of urgent reform of their migration policy if future tragedies of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea are to be avoided. They should also facilitate the integration and settlement of their migrant population on humanitarian grounds, for better inter-communal relationships and in order to benefit more from their skills and their cultural capital. The reforms are also needed for the sake of democratic political culture in the EU. A fact/evidence-based migration policy would provide a positive view of migrants and their contribution to the public sphere that could counter the negative propaganda and fear-mongering of the emergent and resurgent right-wing parties.

The large-scale immigration of Syrians in 2015 and Ukrainians in 2022 demonstrated that with some coordination, most European countries can rapidly and humanely manage their refugee 'crises.' The relatively rapid reception and absorption of these migrants is an opportunity to initiate policies that would benefit future flows of migrants. This needs a strategic approach that acknowledges the long-term flow of migrants and moving away from the current management of 'emergencies.' Note that the current stock of migration has a built-in momentum that leads to migration for family re-union; we should note that 'for the past 20 years, family reunification has been one of the main reasons for immigration into the EU.'¹²

At a more strategic level, the history of international migration informs us that migration is not going to stop as countries develop. More development means more integration of the world economy and more interconnectedness and an intensified flow of information on opportunities around the world; leading to more migration. In general, flows of migration follow a hump-shaped pattern as per capita increases, it will increase rapidly with per capita income, reaches a peak and then the flow slows down.¹³

In a strategic approach, the security and labour market issues of migration must be separated; placing migration for economic reasons on a more rational foundation, based on information and data on the labour needs of Europe, given the rapid ageing of its population and the demands for labour in all sectors.

The EU as a community of nations should invoke its solidarity principle (in line with its support for deprived regions of the EU) in the distribution of refugees and migrants seeking asylum across the EU if it were to survive as a political and legal entity. There is already a precedent with regard to EU-coordinated solidarity with the Ukrainian war refugees. As part of this solidaristic approach humanitarian corridors, including search and rescue at sea, should be established to ease the pressure on the 'front-line'

¹² European Commission (2023). *Migration and home affairs. Policies: family reunion*. Available at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/legal-migration-and-integration/family-reunification_en

¹³ International Organisation of Migration (2021). *World Migration Report 2022*. Available at: <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022>.

countries; furthermore the Dublin Convention should be renegotiated so that refugees would not need to apply for asylum in their first country of entry.

The settlement and integration of migrants should also be part of this solidaristic approach. Again, there are precedents in EU-level regulations for migrating EU nationals that should be extended to all migrants as a matter of equality and non-discrimination. EU citizenship based on long-term residence (domicile) either in addition to member state nationality or independently has been a policy proposal since the early 1990s. Third country nationals are contributors to the economic and social life of the EU and therefore should not be excluded from its benefits on the basis of their nationality in the European Union, which condemns discrimination on the ground of nationality. Other grounds in favour of such a legal reform include promoting the smooth incorporation of non-nationals and more cooperation in diverse communities; ending the projection of the nationalist logic onto European Union citizenship; that could partially address and acknowledge Europe's colonial past and its ambiguous relationship with racial otherness.

Integrating immigrants in the economic and social life of a member state is an integral part of any settlement policy. In this regard, integration policies should go beyond the essentials of language skills and respect for the laws and customs of the host country. Facilitating access to the labour market for all migrants, including asylum seekers, would speed up their integration and help them to contribute to the economy and reduce the cost of the host country's supporting them.

The EU should go beyond the control and management of the current migration crisis which is more like a permanent crisis for the migrants than a temporary and local crisis for the EU. Migrants risk their lives on very dangerous illegal journeys to Europe because of the inadequacy of legal routes of entry. They arrive on European shores in a state of crisis which continues with the lengthy process of their legitimation. Europe needs its migrants, as it has throughout history, especially in view of its ageing population and the demand for labour in care, health and other service sectors. Let us hope that people in the EU could mobilise support to demand humane migration and settlement policies from their politicians. The refugee crisis is an opportunity for the EU to change its migration policy.