

Chapter 1

Demographic trends, labour market needs and migration

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The contribution of migrants to receiving countries is a controversial issue. Statistics on the demographic contribution of migration can be presented from different perspectives on flows or stocks, taking into account first generation of immigrants or also their children. These figures reflect different time perspective on the contribution of migration to population growth and age structure. In terms of demographic growth, migration is in balance with the baby boom and increased life expectancy, and the effects of these two phenomena are often overlooked. In the case of France, from 1946 to 2014, international migration contributed to approximately one third of population growth.

Can migration counterbalance the effects of population ageing in terms of labour needs? Although the utilitarian case for immigration commonly argues the capacity of migrants to counter population ageing, labour migration can only play a limited (as in many longstanding immigration countries family and humanitarian migration are relatively much more important) and a temporary role (as migrants age).

The history of migration over the three last centuries reveals a permanent tension between two extreme visions: migration restricted to work migration adjusted to short-term economic needs, versus settlement migration. The main challenge for migration policy is to find a form that conciliates both.

1.1. Introduction

The demographic and economic contribution of migrants to sending and receiving countries is a controversial issue, and is a typical example of a debate in which logical or scientific reasons are not sufficient to convince public opinion. Demographers commonly estimate net migration rates, i.e. the share of population growth due to net migration (inflows minus outflows), taking as a reference the total number of inhabitants in the country at the beginning of the year. This indicator is generally expressed per thousand and ranges between 1 and 6 per thousand in most western countries.

However, net migration rates do not inform the public debate on immigration even when levels reach record highs (for example, around 10 per thousand in Germany in the 1990s and 15 per thousand in Spain in the mid-2000s). Policy makers and the media are not familiar with the order of magnitude of net migration (or birth or mortality rates expressed the same way). If demographers try to make the net migration rate more accessible by converting it into percentages (for instance 0.3% instead of 3 per thousand), they are often suspected of minimising the importance of migration because relating annual flows to the national population leads to an apparently derisory figure.

Migrants and population growth: From short-term flows to sustainable stocks

A more pedagogic presentation of net migration flows can be seen when comparing the respective contributions of net migration and natural increase to the annual population growth. The question is simple: compared to natural growth, is net migration higher, equivalent or lower? If net migration is positive (more immigrants than emigrants) while natural growth is negative (more deaths than births), the contribution of migration to population growth will exceed 100%, i.e. migration will either fully or partially compensate for population decline and become the only engine for population growth. For example, since the beginning of the 1970s, Germany's population would have been in decline without the positive contribution of migrants.

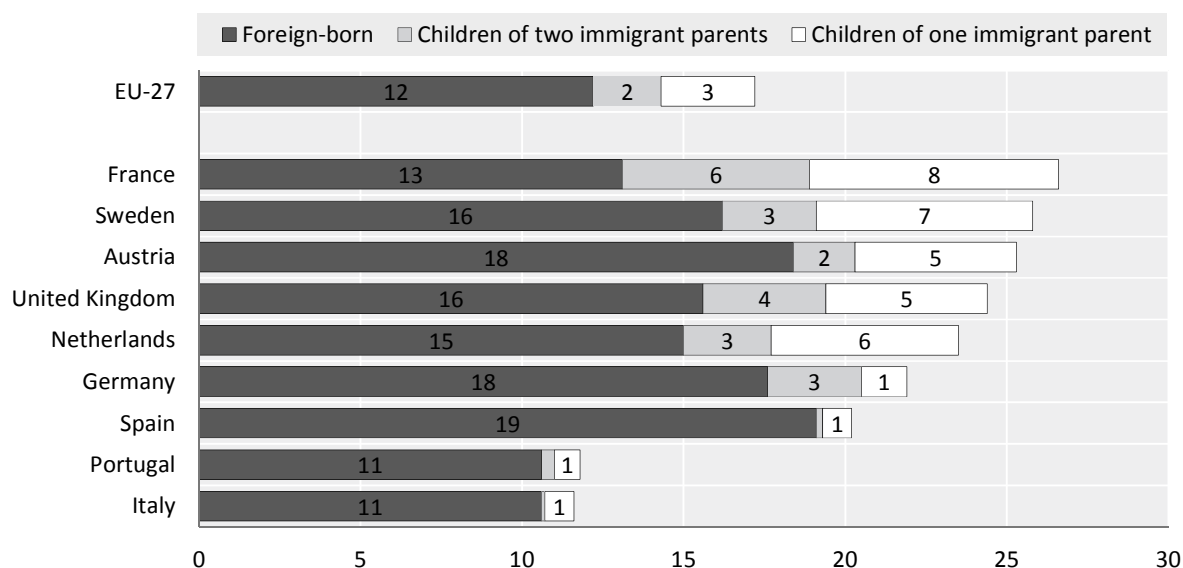
It must be remembered, however, that the comparison of net migration with natural growth cannot be interpreted as a clear-cut distinction between external and internal growth. Births registered in a determined year can be partly due to immigrants who settled in previous years. In addition, native-born may contribute to net migration through expatriation and returns.

To measure the impact of migration flows on the "stock", it is necessary to shift from a short-term to a long-term perspective which raises the question: to what extent is the population mix of a host country affected by the migration stock accumulated over decades? The best way to estimate this phenomenon is to conduct surveys or censuses that gather information on the origins of the population (countries of birth and former citizenships of both parents). In countries which previously saw high levels of immigration, such as France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United States, the foreign-born population constitutes approximately 10% of the total population. By adding the so-called "second generation" (i.e. native-borns with at least one foreign-born parent) this figure may approximately double and range between 15% and 25%. In France, for instance, 22% of the total population is either foreign-born or born to foreign-born parents, and constitute 26% of the workforce (Figure 1.1). This figure is a recent outcome from national surveys conducted since 1999 and has been widely reported in the media.

The share of "people with a migrant background within host OECD countries is now so important that the question of their "utility" is no longer relevant. There is a case for

estimating the fiscal and social costs of annual inflows and outflows of migrants (OECD, 2013), but the financial estimate should not extend to the stocks of population with a migrant background, including ex-migrants of all ages and the second generation. Does it make sense to ask whether 20% or 25% of the population are “useful” to the rest of the population?

Figure 1.1. Percentage of immigrants (“1st generation”) and children of immigrant(s) (“2nd generation”) in selected countries



Source: Eurostat Labour Force Surveys, ad-hoc module 2008.

Migration between too thin flows and too large stocks

From the perspective of the public debate, demographics on migration produce unexpected figures with a high percentage of the population with a migrant background on one side, compared with very low figures of net migration expressed per thousand on the other. Although a classic phenomenon, this contrast puzzles many. By definition, the order of magnitude changes when it comes from the flows to the stock. Each annual tree-ring may seem modest but if the same process is to be repeated over decades the trunk will eventually reach a respectable size. Demographers are alternately suspected of minimising immigration flows (to put public opinion at rest) and inflating the size of the “migrant stock” (to emphasize the irreversible reality of the settlement of migrants and their families).

In recent immigration countries, however, especially in southern Europe, the proportion of children of immigrants is still very low. Consequently, the high proportion of immigrants in the total population is rightly perceived by the general public as the consequence of recent massive inflows of new migrants (as illustrated in Italy and Spain). In France, in contrast, the correlation between stock and flows is not as straightforward. It is widely believed that the high percentage of population with a migrant background is due to the recent influx of newcomers. In fact, it is the product of migration over a number of decades, involving several generations.

Factors of demographic growth: Migration in balance with the baby-boom phenomenon and increased life expectancy

Another widespread myth is that population growth in many EU countries since World War II is entirely due to immigration because fertility rates, the other motor of population growth, have not reached the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman. This view is erroneous and should be tackled with counterfactual projections (i.e. what would have happened without...?). These projections identify the different factors of population growth over a long period of time and, consequently, take a weighed view of the contribution of migration to population dynamics in general. Priority is no longer given to the binary distinction between native and foreign-born people but to the dynamic relationship between migration and the other driving forces of demography, namely increases in life expectancy and variations in fertility rates, especially the long lasting impact of the baby boom.

In France, for example, the last counterfactual projections published¹ highlight that without migration, the baby boom or a decline in mortality, it would have a smaller population in 2014 than in 1946 (34 million people instead of 40 million) due to the age structure of the population before World War II. In the wake of the war, in 1939, France had the oldest population in the world (a record now held by Japan). However, from 1946 to 2014, France's population rose by 24 million, i.e. an absolute gain of 30 million. Of the population growth in France during this period:

- 33% was due to immigration (10 million)
- 35% was due to the baby boom (10.5 million)
- 32% was due to increases in life expectancy (9.5 million).

This kind of exercise has several merits. First, it is a reminder that population ageing is not only a consequence of the decline in fertility rates but also of the steady increase in life expectancy since the 1970s (three months per year, six hours per day), a factor of population growth which is commonly overlooked. The mechanical consequence of a longer life expectancy, where longer lives mean more lives at the same time, is often underestimated.

Another overlooked factor is the long lasting impact of the baby boom. Although the baby boom ended around 1974, it generated an increase in women of childbearing age which, in turn, generated a secondary increase in the following generation, despite the decline in fertility. Variations in life expectancy, fertility rates and migration interact, and calculating the respective contributions of these three factors to population growth rests on simplified assumptions. Moreover, results may vary from country to country. Systematic data are lacking but it would be interesting to extend the same counterfactual projections to all OECD countries. The relative impact of the baby boom is certainly lower in Germany, which experienced a later and shorter baby boom than France, the United Kingdom or the United States. Whatever these variations, demographic growth experienced by western countries since World War II cannot only be attributed to immigration.

Second-degree utilitarianism

Humanitarian associations have a very different strategy and ask economists or demographers for arguments in favour of immigration to counter anti-immigration opinions. In so doing, they use utilitarian arguments they do not necessarily believe in

(second-degree utilitarianism) because they think policy makers will only understand utilitarian language.

Under such conditions, why should economists and demographers participate in this debate? After all, if human rights defenders have to reason in accordance with their own convictions, they should use arguments based on the defence of rights. Consequently, receiving countries ask: are immigrants really there to fix the age pyramid and fill the depleted labour force (cyclical or contingent reasons) or simply because they have the right to migrate (permanent reason)?

The problem with the utilitarian justification is that it is contingent upon circumstances. In France, young immigrants are a minor complement to the age structure. In Germany, they substitute unborn children and alleviate the labour shortage. The cost-benefit analysis of migration for social accounting, growth, wages, etc. does not provide firm results and clear orientations. Rather, it depends on the stage of the life cycle and, at the macro-level, on the history of past migration waves. Respect for human rights, however, is far from being a contingent argument, rather it is an overarching ideal, a permanent necessity.

There are therefore two different registers of necessity. On the one hand, the equality of rights is a categorical, universal and permanent imperative. On the other are demographic or economic goals, such as replacing generations or labour market equilibrium. Neither goal is self-evident nor consensual.

“A day without immigrants”: Empirical experience or thought experiment?

The utilitarian case for immigration makes a recurrent use of counterfactual scenarios, examples of which, and their conceptual limits, are outlined below.

In an article published in 2013, Mehdi Hasan, Political Director of *The Huffington Post UK* wrote that “without immigrants, our country wouldn’t function. So let’s give it a go for 24 hours” (Hasan, 2013). Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush also offered an interesting variant of the counterfactual argument, combining the business case for immigration (“they create far more business”), the demographic case (“they bring a younger population”) and a moral case (“they love families”, they have “more intact families”).²

The origins of the “what if not” scenario for immigration in the United States can be traced back to the success of the mass demonstrations against the “Sensenbrenner Bill” which was passed by the House of Representatives in December 2005. The proposal included, *inter alia*, criminal penalties for “aiding and abetting” illegal aliens, the definition of illegal presence as a felony and the construction of a double-layered 700 mile fence along the United States-Mexico border. On 1 May 2006, the “Great American Boycott” succeeded in mobilising approximately one million marchers across the nation, essentially Hispanic migrants. It was soon labelled “A day without illegals” or, more commonly, “A day without immigrants”. The Bill was eventually rejected by the Senate. However, as successful it was from the political point of view, the Great Boycott failed to prove that the withdrawal of a significant share of the migrant working force could seriously jeopardise the American economy in a single day. The counterfactual demonstration turned into a symbolic thought experiment. The economic impact of this counter-scenario is so far unknown.

This inspired a similar movement in Paris and other cities across France. On 1 March 2010, journalists Nadir Dendoune and Nadia Lamarkbi, and history teacher,

Peggy Derder, launched “A day without immigrants: 24 hours without us” (“*La Journée sans immigrés: 24 heures sans nous*”). The movement stemmed from racial profiling by police, and discrimination and xenophobia in general but did not call for the legalisation of illegal migrants. Despite wide media interest, it did not rely on a mass movement of the population. The promoters were apolitical and their idea was not to assess the economic impact of a nationwide boycott by migrant workers, legal or not. A second “Day without immigrants” was held on 1 March 2011 but there was no follow-up and it failed because it was launched without, or with too few, immigrants.

Beyond the question of the financial and strategic resources mobilised through such movements, their limited outcome needs an in-depth interpretation. Why was it so difficult to persuade immigrants to demonstrate their importance through boycotts or counterfactual scenarios? After all, immigrants and their children make up a significant share of the workforce in several sectors of the economy, in particular in the less skilled sectors.

Paradoxically, the question of utility becomes more obsolete the greater the number of immigrants in a country. Outside periods of expansion or reconstruction, immigrants and their children are no longer indispensable as such, i.e. by their specific skills. They undoubtedly count but simply because they make up a component of the whole society among others. After all, every social category (profession, age group, gender, residential area, etc.) could claim “a day without us”.

Resorting to young migrants to counter population ageing? United Nations projections

The utilitarian case for immigration commonly argues the capacity of migrants to counter population ageing in the receiving country. The systematic introduction of young migrants would save western countries from demographic decline.

However, there are important limits to this assessment.

When looking at the issue, demographic projections released by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) can be used to highlight the relative growth of each age group over the next 50 years. The most solid part of these projections is the trend in the number of people aged 60 years or more (all of whom are already born). While calculating the prospective number of births is more problematic, it is still possible for the next 20 or 30 years since the number of women of childbearing age over this period is already known (but not their propensity to have children). In contrast, there is no way to estimate the importance of net migration over the next decades.

In Germany, projections confirm that the oldest age group will continue to grow (by 75%) as a direct consequence of increases in life expectancy and the baby boom. The sharp decline of the middle and the youngest age group (by more than 25%) is due to the decline in fertility rates far below the replacement level. The interval between the upper and the lower curves illustrates the importance and inexorable character of population ageing in Germany.

Family policies (aimed at enhancing fertility) or migration policies (encouraging repeated inflows of young migrants) cannot impact the trajectory of the upper curve, since it only depends on progress in life expectancy among the elderly. They only have a limited effect on the lower curves. Instead of declining by 25%, the active age group in Germany could decline by only 15% to 20% if family and migration policies are strongly combined. Increasing employment rates of seniors and juniors could also be a

contributing factor. This slight reduction in the gap between the growth of seniors and the decline of juniors will, however, not succeed in offsetting the ageing process, evidenced by the gap between the curves. Young migrants cannot counter population ageing, they can only mitigate it.

No French exception for mortality and “ageing up the pyramid”

The comparison with France illustrates the similarities and differences between the two demographic regimes. To put it in simple terms, while France sees an exception in terms of fertility rates (in contrast with most of its neighbouring countries), it does not see one as far as mortality and life expectancy are concerned.

The reason for this dissymmetry is simple. The reasons for an ageing population in France follow a general phenomenon in other OECD countries: increased life expectancy, reinforced by the structural impact of ageing baby-boomers. France will not escape a rapidly ageing population over the coming decades, nor will the United Kingdom or the United States. The difference lies in the middle and the youngest age groups. Thanks to a fertility rate close to the replacement level, France will maintain a stable workforce over the coming decades. Migration contributes to this stability, but only as a limited complement, not as a “replacement migration” for unborn children as in Germany.

Settlement v mobility: The need for synthesis

Academic research on migration currently prioritises “circulation”, “mobility”, “transnationality” and “diasporas”. Important as they are, these realities cannot offset the fact that the majority of migrants and their families settle and establish roots in the host country. One would not understand otherwise why immigrants or children of immigrants (first and second generation) make up more than 20% of the total population in the biggest European countries (France, Germany, the United Kingdom). Transnational practices do not exclude settlement. It may even facilitate the rooting process, since mobility is now a generalised phenomenon, shared by migrants and non-migrants.

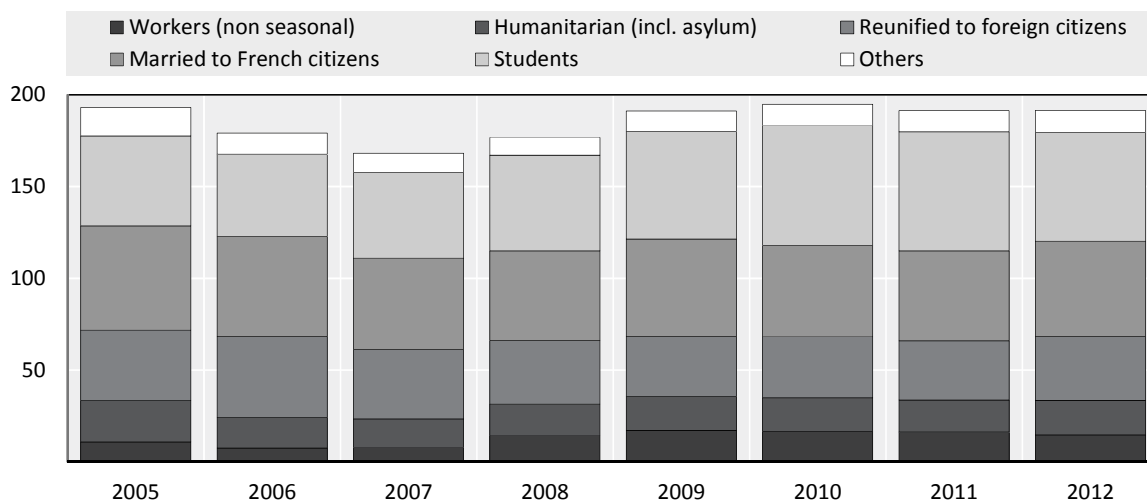
Immigration is a long-term process. Migrants themselves underestimate the length of stay their economic projects require. They also marry and establish families with growing children. As already indicated, if a significant share of migrants prefer to return to their home-country or move on elsewhere, the majority eventually settle and contribute to reshaping the composition of the host country. In practice, labour migration is generally followed or accompanied by family migration. Circulation ends up in settlement. Demographers should not rule out one of these behaviours but articulate them both. In these conditions, justifying migrations by contingent and variable needs does not cover the long lasting process of migration, perpetuated by chains of information and contacts, and by long-term strategies in favour of the next generation.

Old immigration countries since 1975: Disconnect between inflows and economic needs

Utilitarian justifications for immigration are limited by the importance of migrant inflows linked to the exercise of rights, compared with the response to economic or demographic needs. In France, the majority of first permits allocated to migrants correspond to the first admission category (Figure 1.2). From 1975 onwards, migration inflows no longer followed economic cycles, at least in old immigration countries.

Figure 1.2. The weight of family and humanitarian migration to France

Annual inflows of registered migrants from non-EEA states by admission category, 2005-12



Source: First residence permits granted to non-EEA immigrants (French Ministry of the Interior).

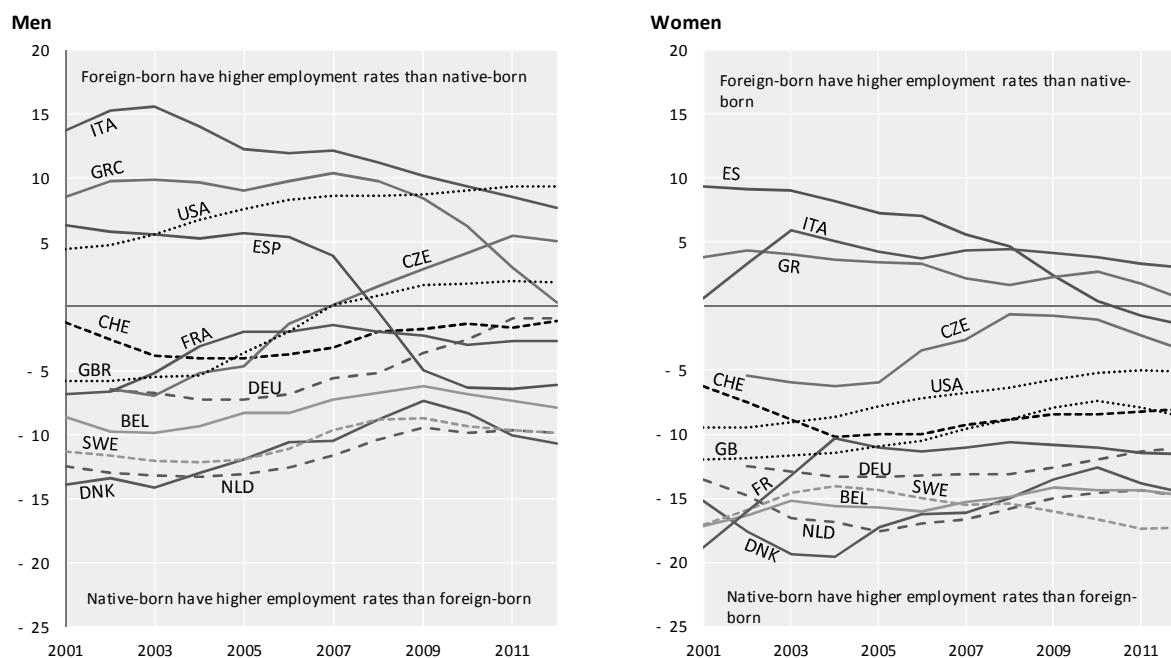
Previously, migrants were recruited to rebuild countries during the post-war period and to ensure economic growth in times of prosperity. More recently, they are recruited to work in hospitals and mitigate population ageing. The case for migration takes the form of utilitarian arguments: migration is indispensable to fill the gaps in the population pyramid and the workforce. The question, therefore, is: should international migration be justified by economic and demographic reasons or for the sake of human rights?

Admittedly, the primary factor in the decision to migrate is economic. People migrate to have a better life for themselves and for their family. In order to achieve this goal, applicants look for a host country which offers the required economic, social and political opportunities, particularly a level of governance that offers a secure and predictable environment for building a new life. However, having obtained a residence permit on grounds of human rights, these non-economic migrants may then enter the labour market. Thus, the bulk of non-labour migrants are *de facto* labour migrants, although in many cases they officially enter for marriage, asylum or educational reasons.³

From the 1970s onwards, the official admission categories used for migrants corresponded less closely to the real motives for migration. Beyond the administrative classification, migration flows in many countries no longer followed economic trends. Three groups of countries can be distinguished (Figure 1.3).

In countries with a history of immigration – France, Germany and Switzerland – foreign-born employment rates are lower than those of native-born, since they have not entered the country with a job offer but as family or humanitarian migrants. This trend is even stronger in the Nordic countries selected here, probably because of their active asylum policy. The relationship is reversed in the new immigration countries of southern and central Europe where immigrants have a higher employment rate than the native-born, because they have been directly attracted by job opportunities. Accordingly, they are also younger than migrants to the rest of Europe. The case of the United States deserves special attention as it looks as if the steady inflows from Mexico and Central America will transform the nation into a permanently young immigrant country.

Figure 1.3. Differences in employment rates between foreign-born and native-born in OECD countries (men and women), 2001-12



Source: Database on Immigrants in OECD Countries (DIOC), www.oecd.org/migration/dioc and Labour force surveys, moving average on three years.

From “Birds of Passage” to the application of rights, regardless of the economy

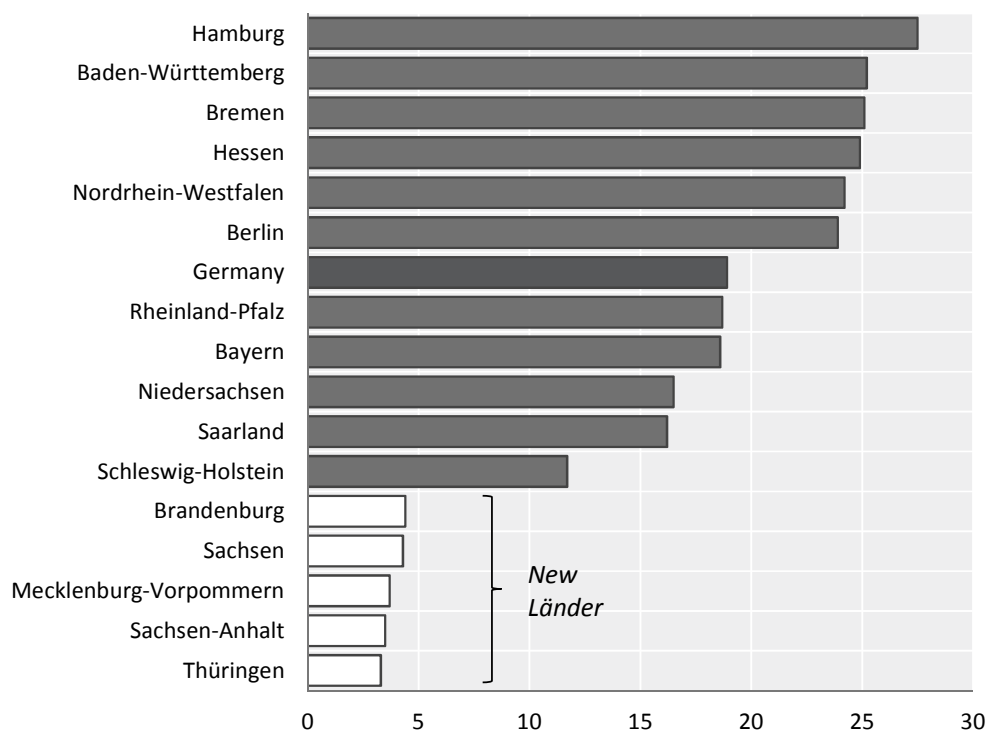
In *Birds of Passage*, Michael Piore (1979) explained that the main constraint upon migrants before the oil crisis was the pressure exerted on them not to settle. In order to adjust human resources to labour market needs, the employers prefer to deal only with “birds of passage”. If the objective is to narrowly tailor migrant flows to the needs of the economy, work contracts should not exceed a couple of years. Such a view prevailed throughout Europe prior to the 1974 oil crisis transition and before large numbers of migrants began settling for the long-term. Interestingly, it is a view which is making a comeback.

Piore’s model was based on the premise that migrants do not really volunteer; that their degree of freedom is severely limited; and that they do jobs the native-born population do not want to do. Migrants not only benefit industry but also help consolidate the privileges of the insiders, especially native-born with protected status. Migrants themselves have no intention of staying in the host country; they simply want to save enough money to return to their country of birth. Any prolongation of the stay for family or financial reasons is seen as a failure (for instance, underestimating the cost of finding a home to house a bigger family). According to Piore, things change when migrants redo their accounts and resign themselves to staying in their new country. Their children have gone to school and are increasingly acculturated; they aspire to qualified jobs that place them in competition with native-born workers and are unwilling to “return” with their parents to a country of origin with which they are not familiar.

A new source of inflows: Human rights disconnected from economic needs

After the onset of the 1973-74 oil crises, some European countries responded to rising unemployment by drastically reducing direct inflows of workers, admitting them under a selective exemption system. At the same time, governments and public opinion realised that migrant inflows were increasingly fuelled by compliance with international human rights agreements: the right to cross-border marriage, the right to family reunification, the right to seek asylum and later a right which, although less formalised was nonetheless real, namely the right to go abroad to complete one's education in a good university. The majority of migrants no longer enter a country for economic reasons, rather simply because they have the right to do so. France offers a striking example of this prevalent situation (Figure 1.2). The contrasted situation between German Länders also illustrates the weight of history in shaping migration (Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4. Proportion of population “with a migration background” (first + second generations) in German Länder



Source: German census 2011.

The old idea that migration inflows and outflows logically follow the curve of economic activity is certainly valid for new immigration countries, but not for the old ones where the low elasticity of migration flows to economic trends has been observed since at least the 1970s. In Spain, the burst of the financial bubble was followed a couple of years later by that of the migration bubble. No institutional or legal mechanism could have cushioned this direct impact. There is a significant difference between an economic incentive and a right. If a migrant entered a country legally thanks to the recognition of a right (and all the more so if it is a human right), a change in the economic context will not be a motive to leave the country. However, if a migrant migrated primarily for economic

reasons, whatever their legal status, they may prefer to move from this country to one which is more attractive. At the risk of exaggerating, the recognition of a right of entry, as opposed to an economic incentive, might potentially be an institutional trap.

From the point of view of migrants, this rigidity is also a protection: rights are not a bubble liable to burst at any shock. However, as pointed out by Daron Acemoglu, a Turkish-American economist, the guarantee of stable and protective institutions can be integrated into a more comprehensive view of well-being. With regard to migration, rights and markets are not enemies, they follow different lines, but reconciling them is a reasonable challenge.

1.2. Conclusion: Learning from the past – Conciliating economic needs and human rights

The history of migration over the three last centuries reveals a permanent tension between two extreme visions: migration severely restricted to work migration adjusted to short-term economic needs, versus settlement migration (including the possibility of family unification, local rooting, unlimited residence permits and full integration by the rule of law). Many intermediate solutions have prevailed. In general, the victory went to the second argument. The narrow-minded concept of short-term recruitment of workers without family attachments has been incarnated in a long chain of systems: slavery, indentured workers, the “ticket-system”, the “Birds of Passage” system. It is still incarnated in the sponsorship system established in some Gulf States. The downside is well known: gender and age imbalances, shortage of women of reproductive age, negative natural growth (below the replacement rate) and the need to cope with a high turnover in recruitment. The opposite approach integrates the necessity of raising and training the younger generation. The gamble being that long-run costs are lower than those of perpetually reconstituting the workforce from abroad.

Since human rights have become a driving force in human mobility, inflows and outflows of migrants will no longer narrowly follow the changing curves of economic (or demographic) needs, except in new immigration countries. The real challenge to migration policy is to find a form that conciliates economic needs and human rights. Training, language courses, integration courses (practical initiation to daily life, economic issues, civic procedures, socialising with other groups) are necessary in this respect. It may seem expensive in the short-term, but in the long-run it is certainly beneficial to society at large.

Notes

1. Aubry et al. (2004) for the 1946-2004 period; Breuil-Genier et al. (2011) for the 1980-2010 period.
2. Jeb Bush : “America will decline without immigrants”, *MSN News*, 14 June 2013.
3. Incidentally, family reunification of women is not always associated with labour force participation. In most countries of the Arab-Muslim area, the average participation rate of women is strikingly low: 29% in North Africa, 23% in Western Asia, compared to 43% in Central America or 57% in Southeast Asia (UN-DESA, *The World's Women 2010*, New York, p. 77.). Such a gap is logically reflected in the high rates of unemployment among the first generation of Turkish or North African women living in western countries. However, a possible reason for female emigration may be precisely the desire to find a more favourable environment for working women, at least for their daughters.

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