Editorial

Migration touches upon the very notion of the nation state. Changes in legislation governing who can enter or stay legally in a host country, who can settle with his or her family, who can obtain citizenship or can vote, can all have an impact on social norms, values and institutions.

This explains why the management of migration flows and the integration of foreign-born people in OECD countries are among the most sensitive and complex policy issues we face. Migration policy decisions are often magnets for controversy and, at the same time, migration and integration generally rank high in the list of people's concerns in opinion polls.

Yet migration is not a new phenomenon. People have always migrated in search of better lives elsewhere. And while migration flows are at record high levels, and many OECD countries have a sizeable share of their population born abroad, the public discourse in the press and social media is often dominated by partial or distorted views, with migrants used as a scapegoat for unrelated problems or fears. In many cases, migration tends to be reduced to humanitarian considerations, while illegal movements are confounded with lawful ones.

In a number of countries, a common public perception is that migration is uncontrolled and costly. Uncontrolled because borders are not perceived to be secure. Costly because immigrants are assumed to be taking jobs from native workers or claiming social benefits for themselves and/or their families. Numerous analyses, reviewed in Chapter 3 of this publication, clearly show that there is little evidence to support these views. Migration, if well managed, can bring economic and social benefits to destination and origin countries, and to migrants and non-migrants alike. However, it would be a serious mistake to take people's views and fears about migration lightly. They reflect a complex set of conditions that have to be fully understood and addressed.

Firstly, this is not all about economics. Scepticism regarding immigrants' willingness to integrate into the host society and embrace the rules and values of that society is a challenge to be faced upfront. As we clearly show in the second chapter of this publication, many OECD countries have developed civic integration courses and tests for newly-arrived migrants. While there are some doubts as to whether social integration, as such, can be "tested", it is fair to say that taking part in the host society requires, at minimum, the adoption and respect of its core values. Adapting migration and integration policies to reward those who do adopt and respect these values, notably in terms of renewal and stability of residence permits, would certainly contribute to a more balanced migration debate.

Secondly, even when focusing on economic issues, it is important to recognise that while migration policies are generally national, the effects on the labour market and society are largely felt locally. Focusing only on aggregate statistics on flows and integration effects is a mistake because the costs and benefits of immigration are unevenly distributed within countries and levels of government. For example, low-skilled immigrants often concentrate in already disadvantaged urban areas and this, in turn, can pose challenges for their

integration into local communities. Moreover, whilst the total flow of migrants is generally too small relative to the total workforce to affect native employment prospects and pay on average, high inflows of migrants into low-skilled jobs might damage the labour market prospects of young unskilled workers. Recognising the uneven distributional impact of migration and then addressing its consequences is crucial. It is important to identify the winners and the losers, compensate the latter and adapt policies so that negative impacts are minimised.

Migrants themselves are highly heterogeneous and for some, including refugees, the initial steps of providing immediate support upon arrival and guiding them through the different integration steps can be costly and not always straightforward. Acknowledging these facts is a precondition for promoting successful integration but also for an effective communication strategy aiming at closing the gap between public perceptions and reality.

Thirdly, it is legitimate for residents to request information on how many refugees and migrants are arriving and for what purpose, where they will live and work, and what their potential ability to integrate into the society is. Information sharing and communication on migration certainly needs to be improved. In Europe, for example, the latest Eurobarometer suggests that 60% of respondents do not feel well informed about immigration and integration. And EU respondents, on average, overestimate the number of migrants from outside Europe by a factor of two, and half of respondents erroneously suppose that there are more migrants staying illegally than legally, though available estimates suggest that the irregular population is a relatively small fraction of the total number of foreigners.

The OECD *International Migration Outlook* has provided, over the course of its 43 annual editions, detailed comparable data on the stocks and flows of migrants in the OECD. The first special chapter in this year's edition adds an important new component by presenting for the very first time comparable data on the impact of temporary migration and cross border workers on the labour markets of OECD countries. The chapter shows that temporary migrants add 2-4% to the total employed population in Belgium, Israel, Korea and New Zealand, over 9% in Switzerland, and 65% in Luxembourg. This group – because it is very heterogeneous and not always covered in administrative data – is not well reflected in migration analyses. Yet many people look at posted workers in Europe or temporary foreign workers in other parts of the OECD as a threat to their employment prospects.

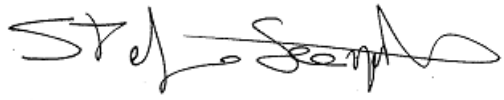
Fourth, real or perceived challenges about integrating an increasing number of migrants are often a signal of other concerns in a society that is increasingly anxious about the present and the future. Concerns about migration and its effects on both the economy and society are associated with a more generalised increase in anxiety and distrust in the ability of governments to address people's needs. Evidence from opinion polls suggests that while there are two sizeable groups of the population with opposing views on migration, there is a dominant middle, undecided, group. Many in this group belong to the middle class, a class that has been increasingly exposed to economic uncertainties. Across the OECD area – with the exception of a few countries – middle class incomes are barely higher today than they were ten years ago. The cost of living – education, housing, health – has however increased significantly and labour market prospects have become increasingly uncertain: one in six middle-income workers are in jobs that are at high risk of automation, compared to one in five low-income and one in ten high-income workers.

Addressing this challenge requires not only adopting a balanced, facts-based, public discourse on migration, which does not overlook the concerns expressed by those who are part of the anxious middle, but also requires helping the middle class with a comprehensive

action plan, as the OECD recommends in its recent report *Under Pressure: The Squeezed Middle Class*.

Finally, there is a need to improve public communication on migration and integration matters. Some countries have developed strong communication strategies on these topics. This is, for example, the case of Canada with the *Immigration Matters* initiative, which demonstrates the benefits of immigration at the local level, dispelling common myths about immigration and promoting positive engagement between newcomers and Canadians. In most countries, there is, however, much room for improvement in communicating about immigration with the public. The OECD is fully committed to promoting better and more effective communication on migration, and in 2018, launched the Network of Communication Officers on Migration (NETCOM). The network gathers communication officers and political advisers working in the relevant ministries, agencies and local authorities of OECD countries to discuss communication objectives and challenges in the area of migration and integration, and to share good practices. The goal of this network is to create a space for exchange, to look at concrete experiences and case studies, and to facilitate cross-departmental and cross-country exchanges, thereby improving coordination, notably in time of crises.

Tackling these challenges will be neither quick nor easy but it is essential that governments and citizens recognise the continuing impact that migration will have on our social norms, values and institutions, as well as our economies and well-being. The OECD will continue to work closely with member countries and all relevant stakeholders to inform a reasoned, constructive public debate.



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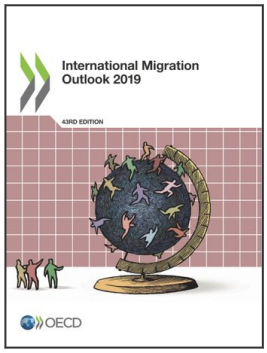

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