

Immigration Policy in Europe: torn between demography, values and war. Outline

Free movement of persons in one of the four pillars of the European Union, especially the Single Market. This 'internal migration' is a right of EU citizens to work, study and live in another member state. The Schengen system complements this freedom e.g., travelling within the Schengen area - which is larger than the EU - without border controls.

'External' migration and its rules and regulations have to fit into this scheme. Pull factors are the demographic development within most of the EU-member states, but also compensating for internal migration. Problems associated with migration are i.e. the recognition of qualifications, language barriers, cultural and religious differences.

An important aspect is migration for work only or migration to live with family reunion – 'you need workers but you get human beings!' Thus, respect for human rights and non-discrimination with nationals. Attracting talents and competition for talents (Blue Card) is also part of systemic competition. At the same time attention to be paid to the working and living conditions, including salaries, for seasonal worker or those in certain areas of the economy (agriculture, construction business).

The EU needs to strike the right balance between effective and realistic migration management that is humane and sustainable, while ensuring security and control of its external borders. In addition, the EU must send a clear message internally that migration can be better managed collectively. There are, however, inconsistencies between Member States' asylum and return systems (strategy on voluntary return and reintegration). Pre-entry screening systems and border procedures are important aspects which have to fulfil rule of law requirements.

Legal immigration schemes, safe and legal pathways to access the EU, are necessary to limit illegal immigration, trafficking of human beings and reduce activities by criminal organisations exploiting migrants.

Confusing migration and asylum, migrants and refugees, causes problems especially for refugees who have a right to protection if their lives are at risk (non-refoulement), while there is no right to migration. Therefore, those who cannot find work, should return as should those persons, who are not granted asylum. Thus, it is difficult to keep the two issues separate: economic refugees, persons with long-time asylum, right to work for refugees in competition with asylum seekers or local workers...

The new Pact on Migration and Asylum aims to provide a new framework for action to ensure freedom of movement in the Schengen area, safeguard fundamental rights and achieve an effective migration policy. One of the fundamental issues raised by this Pact is whether there should be an integrated approach to both, migration and asylum. The working hypothesis is that refugees remain temporarily and return to their homeland, once the situation has improved.

Last but not least, waves of refugees, like the one in 2015 because of Syria, 2021 because of Afghanistan and 2022 because of the illegal war in the Ukraine, put to a difficult test solidarity of the recipient countries. An influx of hundreds of thousands or millions impacts on the social fabric and in the medium- or long term on the labour market with direct repercussions for migrants.