



## **Mobile Identities: Migration and Integration in Transnational Communities**

# **International Migration and Circular Migration: Experiences and Challenges**

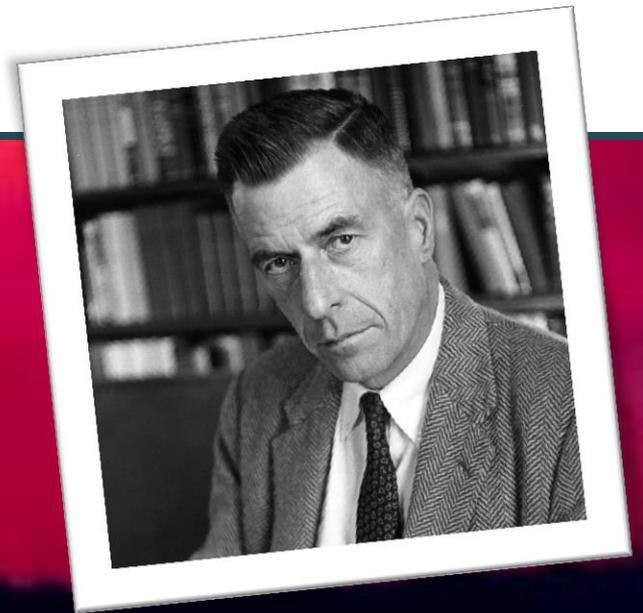
**Peter Nijkamp, JADS, Den Bosch, The Netherlands**



Co-funded by the  
European Union

*Migration is the oldest action against poverty. It selects those who most want help. It is good for the country to which they go; it helps break the equilibrium of poverty in the country from which they come. What is the perversity in the human soul that causes people to resist so obvious a good?*

**J.K. Galbraith**



sions and beliefs of many people, migration not only causes problems but also provides opportunities. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan introduced the term 'Triple Wins of Migration', meaning that a free, but well-regulated international migration regime can have benefits for countries of origin, for destination countries and for individual migrants.

This is the theory. In practice many 'developed' countries fear the influx of migrants and keep their borders closed, thus forcing migrants into illegality. In some places the arrival of large numbers of people from different cultural backgrounds leads to tension and conflicts. Locals fear that migrants will take over their jobs because the latter will agree to lower wages and labour standards. Little by little developed countries are starting to realise that they may need migrants. Low birth rates and the ageing of the population are causing serious labour shortages in sectors like construction, health care and agriculture. Moreover, highly skilled specialists from developing countries - in sectors like ICT, life science and medicine - are essential to maintain innovation and competition in the global economy. The current tendency in Europe is to facilitate certain forms of migration, especially high skilled, but also low skilled.

There is a strong nexus between migration and development. The money migrants send home is important in the fight against poverty. Many believe that development will have a mitigating effect on migration. Others predict that, especially in the short term, development will lead to more migration. Migration, in short, is a process of gains and pains for all involved. The challenge is to regulate this process in such a way that risks and obstacles can be avoided and potential gains are maximised.

'Circular migration' - in which the migrant frequently travels back and forth between his own country and (one or more) destination countries - may go a long way towards achieving the 'Triple Win'. If circular migration becomes legally well organised, migrants could work in countries that need them without putting a strain on host societies, while at the same time staying in touch with their roots.

## CALL FOR ACTION

### Labour migration experiment

Several European asylum organisations are exploring the possibilities of setting a labour migration experiment.

Do you want to contribute?  
Go to → [www.migrationinpractice.eu](http://www.migrationinpractice.eu)

# Potential Gains

## Quality of life

Migrants can drastically improve their quality of life. In destination countries they can earn a decent income and invest in a better future. Migration is often a family decision: the whole family contributes so that one member can pay the costs of travel and look for opportunities elsewhere. In turn, the whole family will benefit from the remittances they receive. For the migrants, migration means enhanced status in the family and the home community. Once they return to their own communities they are often looked upon with respect. In their host country they have gained knowledge and experience, and often they have invested money in their home country, which may guarantee future prosperity.

## Remittances

Most migrants send part of the money they make to their families back home. These official remittances have grown dramatically over the years: from 31 billion dollars in 1990 to 167 billion dollars in 2005. Including the money sent through unregistered channels, the total amount may well be as high as 300 billion dollars. Remittances play an important role in the fight against poverty. According to the World Bank, thanks to remittances, the number of people living in poverty in Uganda has been reduced by 11%, in Bangladesh by 6%, and in Ghana by 5%. Especially if investment opportunities in poor countries are enhanced, remittances can play an important role in development.

## Brain gain

When a migrant returns home he or she brings along all the experiences, knowledge and expertise acquired during his or her stay abroad. This is called 'brain gain'. Migrants constitute a bridge between two countries. For developing countries an active and mobile diaspora means access to 'First World' knowledge, markets, trade opportunities etc. There are a number of ongoing projects that facilitate (temporary) return of migrants and thus stimulate the process of brain gain. Afghan refugees use their skills to help their home country back on its feet. Ghanaian health workers in Great Britain temporarily return to Ghana to train local staff.

## For countries of origin

## Transnational identities

Instead of focussing on the integration or assimilation of migrants in their host country, some experts point at the transnational identities of migrants. Migrants belong to more than just one community and culture. Many have learned to move physically, mentally and socially between their country of origin and (sometimes several) destination countries - and to do so with ease. They travel and know the language, culture, economy and particularities of each country. Living in several cultures simultaneously, migrants often make interesting crossovers that lead to new music, literature, art forms and cultural codes. They therefore create a new transnational identity, making them the true global citizens.

## For individual migrants

## Brain waste

Many migrants are forced to work in jobs that are below their level of education. Their qualifications are not recognised, and their skills and knowledge are not appreciated or do not match the demand of the host country's labour market. Language barriers and cultural barriers too prevent migrants from working at the level they are qualified for. Their brains are, in a way, wasted.

## Social consequences

Migration can have serious effects on social relations and mental wellbeing. Families are often broken up for long periods of time. Children grow up without knowing one or both parents. Thousands of mothers in the Philippines, for instance, are forced to leave their kids with grandparents while they go off to earn money abroad. The social structure in home communities can be affected when families with migrants overseas suddenly have more money to spend and invest, thus creating a new divide between rich and poor. And many migrants can no longer feel at home in their country of origin, while their new 'home country' does not replace that feeling of belonging.

## Illegality

With the possibilities for legal migration almost non-existent and due to a lack of opportunities back home, many people opt for illegal migration. In the Netherlands alone there are between 75,000 and 185,000 illegal immigrants who face many dangers. Each year thousands of migrants die on their journey towards some 'promised land': they drown in the sea, suffocate in unventilated trucks or are intentionally shot. For their perilous journey, migrants often pay thousands of euros to unscrupulous smugglers. Once they have arrived in their destination country, they run the risk of falling into the hands of fraudulent employers, slum landlords, unqualified medical workers, etc. Illegal residents have no access to social security, no benefits. They are underpaid and perform the most dangerous, dirty and smelly work.

## Brain drain

Today there are more Malawian health workers in the city of Manchester alone than in the whole of Malawi. This reflects, in a nutshell, the problem of brain drain. Through migration, countries lose the human capital invested in their population. Developed countries are engaged in a 'battle for brains': they compete for the most talented people in developing countries to come and work with them.

positive impact on the world economy. If supply and demand in the global labour market are better balanced this will stimulate production. Even a small opening in the labour markets - for example through the allotment of temporary work permits to workers from poorer nations - can lead to billions of euros of increased profit. The economy of Spain, for instance, grew by an average of 3.6 % in the last decade. Without the contribution of migrants, it would have contracted by 0.6 % annually during the same period.

## Labour needs

Countries in the European Union desperately need extra labour. According to the European Union, the European working population will have dropped by 20 million in 2020. The corresponding fall in competition and productivity will cause a decline in the standard of living in the EU. In certain sectors - construction, agriculture, services - labour shortages are already evident. In the short term, access to labour can be found in the 'new' EU member states. In the longer term, Europe will need to look further afield to fulfil its labour needs.

the need for migrants who can work in health care, domestic and other services. However, it is a misconception to think that migration alone can stop the ageing of the population. In order to keep the share of the senior population at the present level, net immigration into the Netherlands would have to increase on average by 300,000 persons per year up to 2050. This, of course, is impossible. By filling in the gaps in the labour market, (circular) migration can nevertheless ease the effects of ageing on the economy.

## Diversity

The arrival of people from other cultures can enrich the recipient society. Migrants 'enrich' the local culture with new insights, new expressions and new dynamics. They 'link up' their host country with their countries of origin, providing new opportunities to invest, trade, negotiate and maintain profitable international relations. Migrants can connect their host country to new challenges in the world economy. They can form a bridge between cultures and economies that is of great value to both sides.

## For host countries

## Illegality

Illegality also poses difficulties for host countries. Besides the fact that illegal work does not generate taxes, the presence of large numbers of illegal immigrants gives birth to an illegal - and sometimes criminal - network of service providers, fraudulent labour subcontractors, money transferring businesses, etc. Large groups of illegal migrants also tend to move in together in the cheapest - i.e. worst - parts of the big cities, thus creating ghettos, which in some cases become unliveable for local lower class citizens.

## Ethnic tension

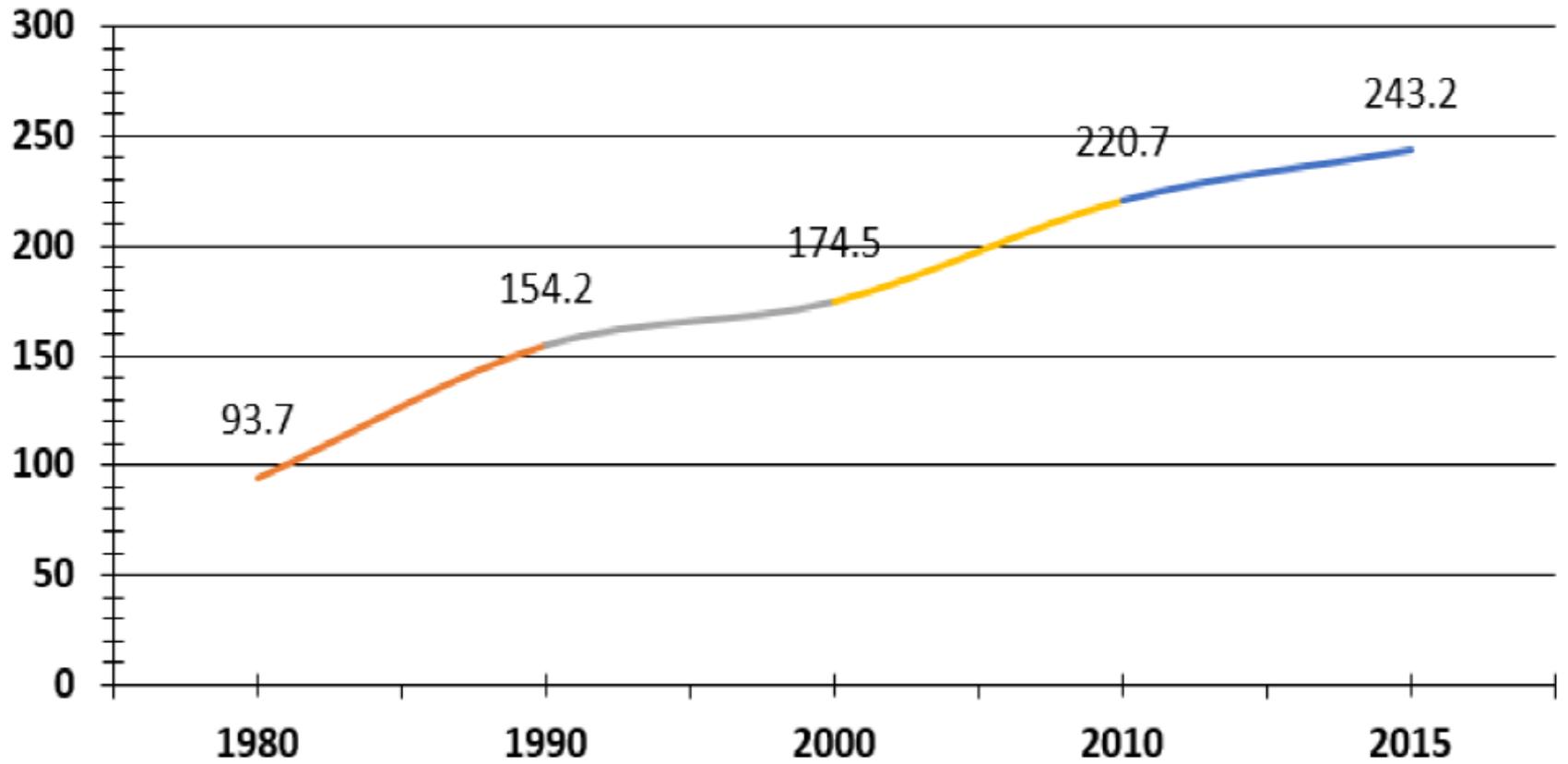
As the riots in the French banlieux and the crisis in the Dutch 'multicultural society' have shown, ethnic tensions are right under the surface in many Western societies. Rightly or wrongly, migrants and their children feel discriminated and locals feel threatened in their way of life. Migrants and lower class locals compete for the same low skilled jobs, for the same cheap housing and for social facilities. It is therefore not surprising that anti-migration parties get their support mainly from the lower classes.

## Welfare state under pressure

As illustrated by the 'guest worker program' of the nineteen sixties and seventies in the Netherlands, migration places enormous pressure on Western welfare states. Migrants and their children make more than average use of social benefits such as welfare and disability funds. The arrival of large numbers of workers from developing countries also exerts pressure on existing labour standards. Migrants are willing to work for lower wages and in worse conditions than locals, thus exerting a downward pressure on the achievements of the labour movement.

# Obstacles & problems

### World Migration Stock (millions)



**Figure** World Bank figures on international migration. Data

*Source:* The World Bank (2016), International Migrant Stock.

# Facts

- Age of Migration
- Since year 2000, migration has increased with 50%
- Nowadays: 258 mln migrants
- Attractiveness of high income countries
- 2/3 migrants in high GDP countries
- These are approx. 20 countries
- Top position: USA (20 mln)
- Chain migration
- Types: Fortunado's, Desperado's, Pensionado's, Clandestino's

# North-Africa: Trends

- Combination of immigration and outmigration
- Stepping stone: welfare ladder
- Middle East Disaster:
  - 2015: 2 mln refugees
  - 2016: 360, 000 refugees
  - 2017: 170,000 refugees

Turkey-deal effect (Greece)

East-Mediterranean Route declined in importance

- Central- East-Mediterranean Route rose in important
  - 2016: 180,000 refugees
  - 2017: 120,000 refugees (cul de sac in Libya)

Western-Mediterranean Route (Spain)

- 2016: 12,000 refugees
- 2017: 23,000 refugees (position of morocco)

# European Responses

- Management of migration flows (e.g. FRONTEX)
- Return Policy programmes
- Temporary and Circular Migration
- 3-Win situation
  - migrant
  - country of origin
  - country of destination

# Dutch Experiences

- Blue Birds
- Assessment: failure
- Policy lessons:
  - bureaucratic rules
  - education
  - market needs
  - communication
  - ethnic enterprises
  - multinationals

# Migration and Development Policy

- Dutch migration and development 2004 policy.
  - The aim of this policy is two folded
    - To promote circular and temporary migration from developing countries to the Netherlands.
    - To avoid the past errors and to develop an integrated foreign policy that can cover both migration and development.
- 
- Three white swans are flying across a clear blue sky. One swan is in the upper right, another is in the center, and a third is in the lower right. They are all in flight, with their wings spread.

# Six Pillars of Migration and Development



Thank You

