



MIGRATION SEEN AS SOLUTION TO EUROPE'S AGEING POPULATION

Migration can offer part of the solution to Europe's ageing population, but social integration and sustaining high inflows of people are problems that remain to be solved.

An article published in the Parliament Magazine reported that ageing of Europe's population is the most pressing issue the European Union (EU) now faces. In 2000, a UN research study showed that the population of virtually all EU countries would age resulting from the lowest fertility and mortality rates in the world. According to the study, it was inevitable that the EU would replace workers with migrants from outside the EU at an increasing rate, with all the political, economic, and social impact the new immigration brings.

In spite of the exhaustive surveys that tended to show that migration is a major solution for the EU to its ageing working-age population, the issue remains controversial due to the following:

- Beneath the population figures for the EU as a whole are important variants. For example, France and the United Kingdom (UK) have been able to maintain their population levels with less immigration while Italy needs more migrant workers. Free movement of workers from the new accession states to countries like the UK and Germany has also provided young EU migrant labor to EU states with relatively older population, rather than the need for non-EU workers.
- Of the actions being taken by member states to deal with this demographic shift, including the changes in retirement age and pension provision, the management of migration has remained one of the most sensitive areas of policy. Migration, particularly from outside the EU, remains a historically and politically charged phenomenon. Established migration patterns from former colonies, family reunification, trafficking, and illegal migration have been the top political agenda of most of the post-war era in Western Europe. The complex nature of immigration

policies in EU states, the difficulties in adopting managed migration policies and the integration of immigrants have dominated the debate.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has released the following results on its study on migration:

- Increasing labor participation of migrants is an option which cannot be ignored in relation to ageing population. When Spain regularized a large number of immigrants in 2005, it saw the evidence of immigrants directly filling vacancies left dormant by the effects of ageing.
- Migrant workers contribute taxes which ultimately fund the growing healthcare and pension bills of ageing citizens from across the EU.
- Migrant workers are involved in older people's health and care jobs which are often low paid and difficult to fill.
- Migration has boosted female labor force participation with a number of migrants providing child care assistance in countries like Spain.

There are two issues on migration that have to be addressed. The first issue is the debate on how big the net contribution of migration actually is. In the UK, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), estimates a £ 6 Billion net annual contribution, but this figure has been recently disputed by a House of Lords Committee. The second issue is the social integration aspect. Sustained high levels of migration cannot take place without the best integration policies. The EU can play a vital role in encouraging best practice, which is often a regional and local issue.

Studies have shown that partly due to ageing population, the entire segments of the economies of EU member-states cannot function without new migration. Without better management and communication by member states on the benefits of migration, migration will remain politically controversial.

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