

Anti-Immigration Policies: The Most Serious Threat Facing Europe

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Masses of forcibly displaced people; disorderly crowds moving across borders; migrant populations stuck in dangerous countries, waiting for a passage to their longed-for destinations; inoperative distinctions between economic migrants and refugees; the hostility of governments to immigration; the inability of the international community to deal with migration-related tensions; the list goes on. Almost every day the migration crisis intensifies, on the ground as well as in political *fora*. In Europe, migration has become the most serious threat to the survival of the Union. But is it an external threat or an internal one, an attack from abroad by migrants or one from within by politicians manipulating migration facts?

1. An Unprecedented Crisis?

'Unprecedented' is the most often-used qualifier in media reports on the current migration crisis. But in what way is this crisis 'unprecedented'? If one considers Europe, the numbers are indeed staggering. The number of migrants smuggled by sea to Europe jumped from a few tens of thousands per year between the 1970s and 2013 to more than 200,000 in 2014 and close to 1 million in 2015. Likewise, the numbers of new asylum claims lodged

in EU member states increased from 372,855 in 2013 to 562,675 in 2014 and to 1,255,685 in 2015.¹ These kinds of numbers had not been recorded in Europe since the end of the Cold War.

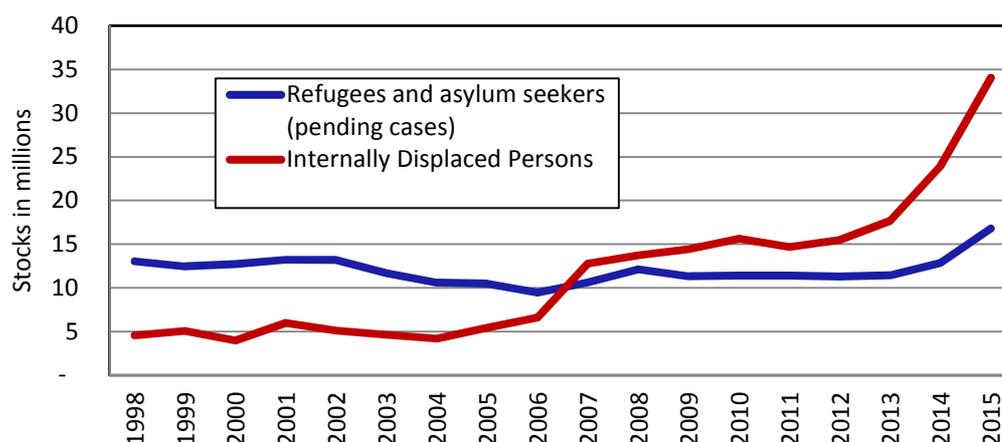
But Europe is not the whole world. Large waves of migrants and refugees have been recurrent since the end of World War II. Boat people from Vietnam, Afghans fleeing first the Soviet and then the US invasions, refugee waves in the Great Lakes of East Africa – these are just some examples of massive cross-border movements. Massive internal displacements of population have, meanwhile, been the drum-beat of recent world history.

A closer look at UNHCR statistics shows that numbers of cross-border refugees increased less, in relative terms, than the world population between 1992 and 2015: respectively from 12 to 14 million and from 5.5 to 7.3 billion.² One should not conclude, however, that the world is safer today than it was two decades ago. On the contrary, forced migration has increased, but the bulk of the increase has been in internal rather than cross-border displacement. The numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) soared from 22 million in 1992 to 33 million in 2015 (see Figure 1).

¹ EUROSTAT, http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyappctzm&lang=en

² Data compiled by the author (refugees: UNHCR Global Trends; world population: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2013). World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, DVD Edition)

Figure 1: Forced Migrants at the World Level, 1998–2015



Source: Author's compilation of annual data from *UNHCR Global Trends*

<http://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-2015.html>

Put in other terms, those fleeing conflict and persecution are increasingly trapped in their own countries, unable to cross the border and unable to find shelter in a neighbouring country. The migration crisis that anti-immigration voices in Europe blame on open borders is actually a crisis of borders that are too tightly closed. Yes, the never-ending streams of migrants appearing on the world's televisions, walking across the Balkans in the autumn and winter of 2015, were huge. But that was because a series of closed border crossings had created critical bottlenecks. Had the frontiers remained open, the refugees would have arrived almost unnoticed.

Stepping back from Europe now and looking at the whole world, what is unprecedented about the current crisis is its global nature. First, similar but unrelated situations are observed on all continents. For example, in the spring of 2016, closed borders between two states stopped migrant flows. This time it was not in the Balkans but in Central America, when Panama shut its border with Colombia in order to halt Cuban migrants heading to the US. In

2015, boats loaded with thousands of refugees were drifting around in a desperate search for a harbour. It was not the Mediterranean but the Andaman Sea, and the refugees were Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar. Second, there is a worldwide dispersion of refugees from the same areas. For example, Australia has become a destination for boat people arriving from Iraq and Syria after a fifteen-thousand-kilometre trek. Third, flows originating in many disconnected parts of the world converge down a select few narrow corridors. For example, the Greek police counted more than 130 different nationalities on the dinghies crossing from Turkey to the Dodecanese Islands in 2015.

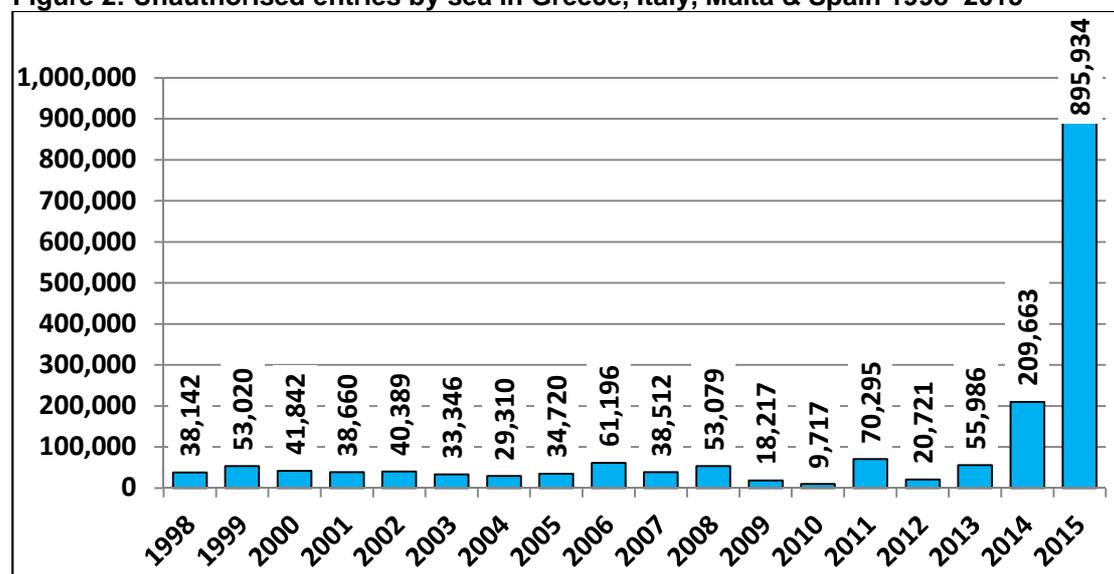
The above facts all reflect the same contradiction: While migration is going global, there is no global governance of migration – no universally shared principles, no comprehensive international law, and no institution in charge.

2. Insecurity in the Mediterranean

In 2014, a movement of unauthorised entries by sea, which had started 40 years earlier, gained enormous momentum, changed its nature, and took to new routes. First, the number of people smuggled across the Mediterranean jumped from an annual average of 40,000 between 1998 and 2013 to 210,000 in 2014 and to 1,020,000 in 2015 (see Figure 2 below). Second, the proportion of refugees among these migrants rose from around 30% before 2011 to 80% in 2015 (see Table 1 and Figure 3 below). Indeed, in the absence of any tool allowing refugees to legally reach Europe (such as resettlement schemes or asylum visas), those seeking asylum in Europe have

only two possibilities: they obtain a visa for other purposes (e.g., employment, studies, family reunion) or travel with no visa and lodge an asylum claim once (and if) they reach an EU member state. Third, as the numbers of Syrian refugees soared, the short crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands replaced the much longer and more perilous journey from Tunisia and Libya to Italy, allowing many more to cross.

Figure 2: Unauthorised entries by sea in Greece, Italy, Malta & Spain 1998–2015



Sources: Italian Ministry of Interior; Hellenic Police, Ministry of Public Order & Citizen Protection; Spanish Ministry of Interior; Frontex Watch Malta.

Table 1: Top Ten Nationalities of Migrants Smuggled into Greece and Italy, 2011–2015

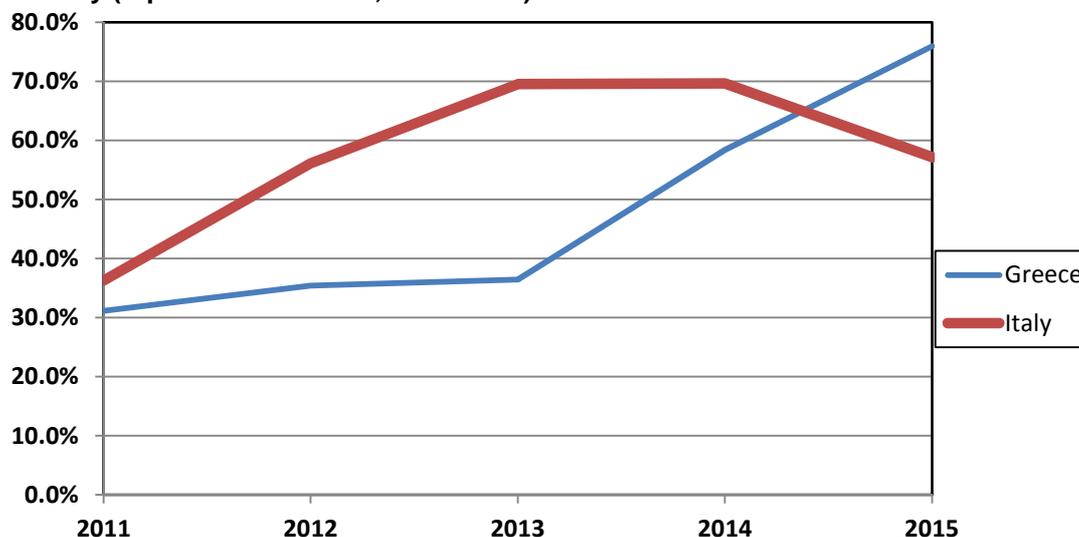
Country of declared nationality	Refugees % (*)	Numbers of migrants / Year				
		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Syria	94.6%	947	8,507	18,972	74,461	462,689
Afghanistan	53.3%	17,841	18,323	6,924	13,685	186,617
Eritrea	86.6%	1,060	2,351	10,406	34,470	37,815

Iraq	66.8%	4,514	8,485	1,721	5,522	64,417
Albania	4.4%	11,982	12,374	5,497	7,299	16,077
Pakistan	21.4%	5,960	807	2,835	8,834	25,044
Nigeria	29.0%	28,827	2,874	925	1,674	22,044
Somalia	62.7%	1,834	2,355	739	1,701	16,499
Bangladesh	10.9%	2,486	417	1,723	9,535	9,090
Tunisia	8.4%	2,429	3,944	4,205	7,520	1,023
All Nationalities		119,635	90,145	82,684	247,262	952,246
Refugees % (**)		33.5%	47.9%	62.9%	70.9%	75.7%

(*) Rate of positive answers to asylum claims lodged in the EU28 in 2011–15

(**) Expected rate of positive answers to asylum claims lodged in the EU28 by migrants smuggled into Greece and Italy in 2011–15

Figure 3: Expected proportion of refugees among the migrants smuggled into Greece and Italy (top ten nationalities, 2011–2015)



Source: Table 1.

While coming from war-torn countries (such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, or Somalia), the vast majority of refugees did not apply for asylum when they

arrived in Greece or Italy, though these are obviously safe countries. Instead, they tried to make their way to Germany or Sweden, fuelling allegations that they were not asylum- but welfare-seekers, parasitical on European generosity. Field evidence, however, shows that most of them entered Europe after a long stay in their countries of first asylum (such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan) where their savings had, with reduced access to work, been exhausted. They had little choice but to move to places where they would no longer depend upon international charity, but rather be able to provide for their needs themselves.

On Europe's doorstep, as the Syrian conflict has entered its sixth year and Iraq has failed to restore peace and security, forced displacements show no sign of abating. The Middle East is both source and host to 50% of the world's 20 million refugees (UNHCR and UNRWA combined). But most states in the region are not parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention, or they are parties but with a geographic limitation to European refugees, as in the case of Turkey. Here, refugees are generously welcomed, but as 'guests' – that is, as persons who cannot claim any rights, including the right to reside. Having offered a haven to 4.8 million people fleeing Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan now have a heavy burden on their economies and unforeseeable consequences for their political stability. Indeed, the influx of Syrian Kurds in Turkey and Iraq has strengthened Kurdish irredentism in both countries. In Lebanon, inflows of mostly Sunni Syrians have overturned the *de facto* population balance on which the country's fragile political system is built. In Jordan, where half of the citizens are themselves refugees from Palestine, the

massive waves of those displaced from Iraq and Syria have reignited old tensions.

Several European states have welcomed forcibly displaced people from Syria (and other countries) on a large scale. As of September 2016, more than 650,000 asylum claims have been lodged by Syrians in the EU28 since the beginning of the conflict in 2011. This number remains modest compared with the 4.8 million Syrian refugees recorded by Syria's four neighbours: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq; it is also worth noting that Israel does not accept Syrian refugees. Moreover, after a period during which Europe was divided between open doors and wire fences, a consensus has emerged to keep further flows of refugees outside the EU. Europe is risking further political destabilisation on its external border by subcontracting the containment of refugee flows in the Middle East (and Northern Africa) with Turkey (and perhaps tomorrow with Libya). Gloomy developments are already in evidence, from the authoritarian drift in Turkey to state failure in Lebanon. The security of the whole Eastern Mediterranean region is at stake.

3. Europe's Demographic Predicament

Precisely at this moment, Europe is entering a period of durable population decline and ageing. Demography challenges its weight in the world as well as its wealth and welfare, and only immigration is able to curb these downward trends. If no migration takes place, by 2050 the aggregate EU28 will have a smaller population than Nigeria, and its largest state, Germany, will rank

twenty-fifth in world population rankings.³ What will then be the legitimacy of dwarfed European nations in world affairs and in the leadership of global governance institutions?

Besides its place in the world, if migration stops today, the EU will lose 40 million workers over the next 20 years and gain 38 million old-age pensioners (See Table 2 below).

Table 2: Population aged 20 and above in the EU28 by age group in the no-migration scenario 2015–2035

Age group	2015	2035	Change 2015–2035
20-44 years	166,270,730	134,278,929	-31,991,801
45-64 years	139,362,704	131,283,267	-8,079,437
65 years & up	95,962,473	133,638,032	37,675,559

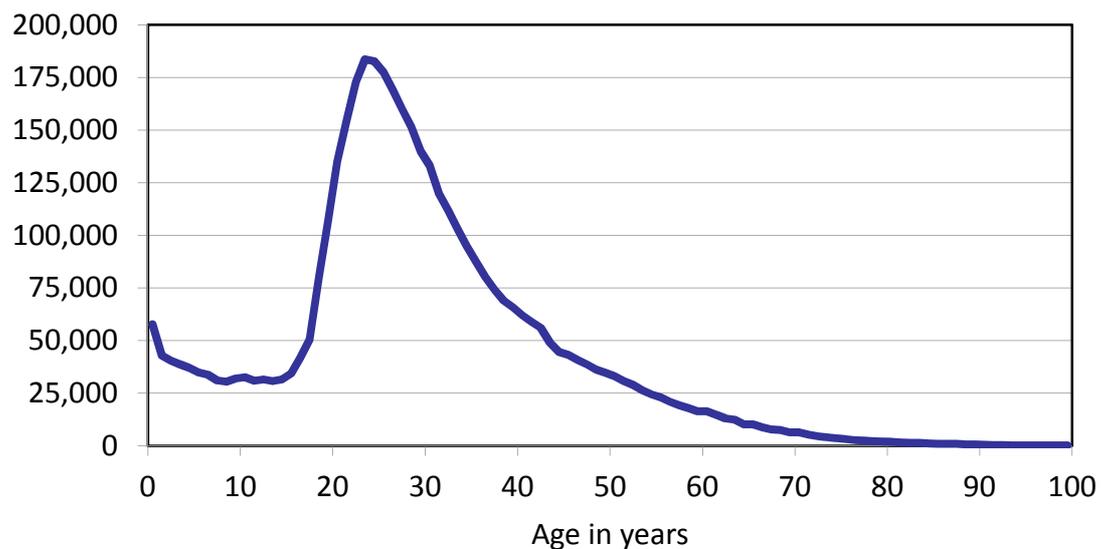
Source: EUROSTAT data

A first, well-acknowledged consequence of population ageing is the unsustainability of current welfare systems, unless the duration of economic activity is continuously (and considerably) lengthened and/or steady flows of replacement migration take place. A second, pernicious, and unnoticed consequence is the high risk of skills ageing. Amongst the workers the EU will lose in the next 20 years, 32 million are young people (20–45 years) whose

³ : United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2013). World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, DVD Edition

up-to-date skills are the necessary in attaining the EU's stated objective of becoming the world's strongest knowledge-based, post-industrial economy. In maintaining a critical mass of recently acquired knowledge and skills, life-long learning is probably not a sufficient response, and immigration is the only realistic solution. Because migrants happen to be young people (See Figure 4 – on average, they arrive at 25 years old in Europe, an age at which an individual's potential contribution to the economy is still growing), they represent an opportunity, one that we should not miss.

Figure 4: Immigration flows in 2010 by age – EU28



Source: EUROSTAT data.

The need for replacement migration is at present overshadowed by high unemployment rates in most of the EU. But the economic crisis is passing, while the demographic predicament is growing. The million refugees who landed in 2015 represent only half of the two million migrants necessary to maintain the size of the workforce every year. Should the logic of labour

markets be applied, not all of them would have been admitted. However, many would bring a useful contribution to the receiving economy, as long as they are admitted to the labour market upon arrival and not after the drawn-out process of refugee status determination. Receiving EU states must quickly add to their necessarily humanitarian approach to refugees a utilitarian consideration. Letting asylum seekers seek employment would work to the benefit of all: of the receiving states' economies and of the refugees' inclusion in their new environments.

There is, however, a built-in paradox in ageing. The more a population ages, the more replacement migration it needs, yet the more reluctant it is to allow immigration. Indeed in 2015, the proportion of Europeans expressing a negative feeling towards immigration from outside the EU was found to continuously increase with age from 52% at 15-24 years to 68% above 55 years, at EU28 level⁴

4. Concluding Remarks

Flows of refugees and migrants converging towards Europe are pushed by war, insecurity, and economic hardships in their countries of origin. At the same time, they are pulled by Europe's rule of law and prosperity. While Europe has little leverage on the push factors on other continents, obviously it has no interest in removing the pull factors at home. In any case, global movements of refugees and migrants will continue, and – unless its economic, political, and social systems collapse – Europe will continue to attract some of them.

⁴ Eurobarometer 83.3 May 2015, <https://dbk.gesis.org/dbksearch/sdesc2.asp?no=5998>

However, for reasons that are not the topic of this paper, anti-immigration sentiments are now dominating the scene. Such sentiments were a decisive trigger in the Brexit vote, as the vehemently anti-immigrant Euro-scepticism of the 'leave' campaigners was not opposed by any symmetrical, pro-immigration voice from the 'remain' side. Any European political leader brandishing pro-immigration arguments would risk his or her constituency. Europe must resolve a contradiction: on the one hand, it regards one million undocumented refugees and migrants as unwanted; on the other, it would need twice this number every year to replace the 40 million natives of working age it will lose over the next 20 years. So what is the way forward?

First, Europe must not close the door to refugees. For the sake of its founding values, but also of its own security, it must return to a policy of international protection and at the same time avoid more refugees making the disorderly, perilous Mediterranean crossing. Opening channels to asylum directly via Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan is the way forward. Granting temporary humanitarian visas to refugees would allow them to reach Europe by regular means and lodge their asylum claims. It would save lives and money. By the same token, it would make two unwanted by-products of the current system useless – namely, the smuggling business and the infiltration of refugee flows by terrorists, since forged passports would be detected before the travel. It would also indirectly contribute to regional security by easing dangerous political tensions linked to the massive presence of refugees among the EU's Middle Eastern neighbour states.

Second, Europe must restore a climate favourable to welcoming the workers its economy needs. The alternative is as simple as this: immigration or

decline. The challenge is to include the newcomers in the social fabric. It is an investment with a high return in the long term. Likewise, the announced demographic downturn will have considerable repercussions in the long term, but it remains invisible in the period between today and the next election. This is precisely where democracy collides with demography (just as with climate change).

Not many leaders have the political courage to take measures that can be unpopular with voters if the benefits will only be harvested by the next generation. Pro-immigration policies require public opinions to be fully informed, not only about the challenges, but also about the opportunities of immigration. It is urgent to dispel stereotypes and disclose the whole truth about migration: not only cases of migrants' failed integration but also the multitude of untold success stories and the massive scientific evidence about the net benefit of international migration. A world with no migration would be the poorest and therefore most unsafe place. Educating the media on this simple reality has become a priority for academics and thinkers.