



On immigration

Description

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For all the problems and crises that the EU has gone through in the past 15 years, immigration is one that still proves difficult to address. It cannot easily be addressed unless countries collectively appreciate the human capital that enters its borders as opportunities rather than just risks.

Earlier in July, EU leaders agreed on a deal on migration. EU agreements are never easy, but any deal on migration must strike a difficult balance between those on the outskirts of the EU borders who receive the waves of migrants and require help and those who are in the middle of the EU who complain that too many migrants move freely into their countries.

Those at the edges complain that they have no choice: they receive all the migrants, get all the blame when things go wrong, and bear the social implications of being unable to absorb all those who attempt to enter EU territory, particularly at the points of entry. Those in the middle face a much less acute emergency.

A key part of the EU deal is that the countries on the edge can accept fewer applicants and therefore send back a lot more of those that are rejected. The middle countries have the choice to pay more money into a common pot rather than accept migrants into their countries. With this deal, the edge countries accept that short of any other help, money will have to do, and the middle counties avoid the social backlash of the waves of

immigration.

Irrespective of how countries opt to share the total 'burden', at the core of the problem is the inability and perhaps more relevant, the unwillingness to accept more migrants. A few hours after the EU struck its deal on migration, the Dutch government fell because coalition partners were unable to agree on the right approach to immigration. At first glance, it feels paradoxical that immigration would be such a thorny issue in a country that is geographically very far from the hot spots, and which is now presented with a choice that those at the edge of EU borders do not have. The Netherlands has sufficient means to pay into a common fund, by comparison to many countries in the EU, so one would have thought this is a much easier problem to solve.

But on second thought, the physical distance reduces the acute nature of the problem and allows for a much more neutral platform for ideas to battle on first principles. The resignation of the government illustrates just how difficult that problem is as it spans many dimensions, from political and economic, to moral and human rights.

Opportunities arising from immigration

The sudden influx of migrants is at the heart of the migration problem everywhere in Europe. European countries are nations of travellers who, throughout history, have always been the ones to emigrate to other countries. The phenomenon of people coming into European countries is relatively new in historical terms. Contrary to the US, which is a country of immigrants, the average person in any of the EU countries still has not been able to accept that the society in which they live will see its culture, customs, and its language become polymorphous.

Changing the narrative from a cultural and societal threat to an evolution of economic integration that offers opportunities could assist in solving the EU's aging problem. An aging continent lacks progressively more and more human capital to cover all the services that it offers. The young people that strive to enter the continent are a unique pool of labour that can help the structural labour deficits in the EU. With appropriate training, the younger migrants and children can acquire missing skills if they are incorporated into the continent's advanced education system. This is not just the right thing to do; it is also necessary for sustaining the existing level of welfare.

Crucially, as the EU educates the flows of migrants that enter, it will help build and sustain important links with their countries of origin, typically in the less developed world, to help reduce some of the inherent resentment that stands in the way of international

cooperation.

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