



MIGRATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Economic downturn and rising unemployment in Europe have led to a stronger focus on migration in the public debate. How are immigrants faring during the downturn? Do statistics substantially change? Recent research takes a closer look at these questions. Find some of it here and more on our website: www.population-europe.eu.

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Migration Becomes More Volatile

Six Questions for Demographer Jakub Bijak

Migration is the most uncertain demographic component. Do we really know what happens to migrants in times of recession?

We know even less than during the periods of stable economy. Under any circumstances immigration is quite difficult to measure and predict, or even to define in a precise way. During the crisis the situation is even worse, as migration becomes more volatile.

What are the consequences of economic downturn on migration flows and on migrants' behaviour?

Usually there may be some reduction in migration flows, increase in returns, and a decline in irregular migration. The impact of migration on host economies is debatable. In the long run, it is suggested that the impact is mostly neutral, but in the short run, migration may have a negative effect on the employment of native workers. This in turn can generate grievances and social tensions. As to migrants' behaviour, there are some indications of increased propensity to settle in the host country. In general, during recessions migrants' strategies become more diverse.

Many young people leave the countries hardest hit. Do you think this is a successful coping strategy?

Young people are generally more mobile than other age groups, so they would migrate more often regardless of economic circumstances. When we look at Eurostat data, on average the current patterns by age do not differ much from those before the crisis. Still, migration is one possible way of coping with economic difficulties, so this question can be actually reversed – why is there not more mobility in Europe, despite the freedom of movement of workers?

Does unemployment cause return migration?

Not necessarily, especially if re-entry may be difficult. Interestingly, the trends in remittances – the money sent back by migrants to their home countries – are steadily increasing, showing resilience to the recession. And sometimes the families in the home countries support migrants through “reverse remittances” only so that they can remain in the destination country until the crisis passes.

Are migrants especially affected by rising unemployment?

I think this question is really broader – the problem is which social groups in general are the most vulnerable during recessions. Of course, some vulnerable people are migrants, but it is worth remembering that migration can be a strategy to reduce vulnerability. Sometimes the most vulnerable people are those unable to move.

Do you think that migrants should be specific targets of policy measures?

I do not think that the policies should specifically focus on migrants, rather than simply on the vulnerable groups. We need to remember that many non-migrants face equally great, if not greater challenges during the crisis.



Jakub Bijak

is Lecturer in Demography at the ESRC Centre for Population Change at the University of Southampton. He has recently published a book entitled “Forecasting International Migration in Europe: A Bayesian View”.



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The recent downturn and its impact on migrants

Does recession affect migrants more than natives? Is this related to being an immigrant or to specific characteristics that make immigrants different from natives? Adriano Paggiaro, Assistant Professor in Economic Statistics at the University of Padua, tried to find an answer to these questions. He compared native and immigrant workers by using longitudinal data from the Italian Labour Force Survey. At first sight, immigrants seem to have the same demographic characteristics as the groups most likely to lose their jobs during a recession. But what happens if immigrant workers are compared to native workers that share the same characteristics? Paggiaro wanted to analyse whether there are still differences between the two groups, even when comparing workers after using a so-called matching process. They were “matched” for certain characteristics through propensity score methods. According to his results, the type of job and contract, the sector, and also the size of the company played a role. Interestingly, Paggiaro found that male migrants are more likely to lose their employed status. In fact, the downturn seems to affect more severely male workers than female. As a result, in 2007, male immigrants were more likely to lose their job. After the downturn, conditions changed for both natives and migrants, but it was still worse for the latter. This was mainly because male workers were overrepresented in sectors which have been affected the most. (Table 1)

	Outcome	2007		2009	
		Immigrants	Natives	Immigrants	Natives
Men	Number	3,698	46,435	4,732	42,407
	Employed in %	96.73	97.63	95.80	97.24
	Unemployed in %	1.76	0.77	2.24	1.20
	Out of Labour Force in %	1.51	1.60	1.96	1.56
Women	Number	2,766	33,011	3,573	30,902
	Employed in %	92.91	95.01	93.37	95.33
	Unemployed in %	2.10	0.91	1.93	1.25
	Out of Labour Force in %	4.99	4.08	4.70	3.42

Source Authors' computations
Graphics Population Europe

Table 1. Transition rates from employment

The overall findings are that workers with the same characteristics are equally affected, regardless their immigrant background. The matching process strongly reduces the differences between immigrants and natives, and in almost all cases these turn out to not be significant anymore. When comparing only comparable workers, immigrant status itself has no impact on unemployment.



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0.1% is the proportion of immigrants in some countries, while in other it exceeds half the population. Where are immigrants most numerous? Where do they come from? Using data from the latest United Nations Statistics, the INED animation tool “International Migration” provides answers for 230 countries. Via maps or country lists you can select your indicator to view immigrant populations, annual migratory growth and total annual population growth.



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Brain Drain in Greece

The migration of the highly educated population could have extremely significant impacts on origin countries' development, especially in cases in which, owing to their economic and social structures, these countries cannot promote the efficient allocation of their professionals. A paper by Lois Labrianidis and Nikos Vogiatzis aims to analyse this phenomenon by using primary data collected from Greece. Their findings indicate that it is not reasonable to expect that a large share of people who left are likely to return, unless they would see dramatic changes for their career prospects. Given the ongoing economic and social crises, this is unlikely to happen in the near future. Instead, the crisis might further exacerbate the observed mismatch between supply and demand for a highly educated workforce in the country.



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Publication

“Migrants and their Money: Surviving Financial Exclusion” by Kavita Datta describes the financial practices of low-paid migrant men and women living and working in London, within the context of the recent financial meltdown. Datta's book looks at how migrants manage in the heart of London, where many of the migrants work in the City or Canary Wharf, the centre of London's financial district. They work as cleaners, nannies, and other domestic occupations. Her aim is to connect global financial markets and global migration flows to the local lives and strategies of getting by and making do among the increasingly diverse migrant workers in London. The book provides an informative and illuminating account of the work lives and financial practices of diverse migrant communities in London, whose experiences resonate with, and have relevance for, other ‘marginalised’ groups in society.



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