

# Chapter 12

## Lessons from the South-North Migration of EU Citizens in Times of Crisis

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### 12.1 Five Lessons from the South-North Migration of EU Citizens in Times of Crisis

In this volume, we have demonstrated that—since its inception in 2008—the global financial and economic crisis has strongly impacted migration flows to/from/within the European Union as well as the way policy-makers and the public have reacted to them. While we have noted an intensification of South-North migration flows in all the case studies, the political reaction of Northern European receiving countries to this increased mobility has often seemed unrelated to the actual size of the phenomenon. Similarly, Southern European countries of origin have also adopted diverse responses, ranging from indifference to active engagement towards the rising level of departure of their citizens.

Over the past few years, the issue of the mobility of EU citizens has become increasingly salient and controversial. As demonstrated in this volume, the arrival of Southern Europeans has often failed to trigger the same level of animosity in destination countries as that of post-accession migrants from Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, the renewed influx of asylum seekers to the EU, which intensified exponentially in the summer of 2015, has been seen to precipitate similar high levels of hostility. South-North flows of EU citizens, however, pose a series of questions for the future of migration in the EU: are we witnessing a repetition of the massive South-North migrations that took place two generations ago? Is migration a principal strategy to cope with the effects of crises within the European Union? How is

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increasing EU migration shaping the debates and policies in countries of origin and destination?

As we bring this volume to a close, we believe that many elements can be found in the previous chapters to help provide some answers to these questions. Building on our different case studies, we can thus identify five main lessons from the renewed migration flows of Southern European EU citizens that are key to our understanding of contemporary migration dynamics within the EU. While the method that has guided our efforts is not strictly comparative, the comparison of elements drawn from carefully selected case studies ensures the validity of those conclusions. Similarly, the use of different data sources in the country chapters is not an impediment to drawing general conclusions on the characteristics of these new migrants. On the contrary, we believe that this diversity of sources has enabled us to identify the most salient issues with regard to new Southern European migration.

### ***12.1.1 Lesson 1: New Southern EU Migrants Are Different from Their Predecessors***

The migratory routes that are now leading Southern European migrants to North Western European Member States may be similar to those used by guest workers in the twentieth century, but the conditions of arrival and the socio-economic characteristics of these new migrants are profoundly different. Post-war migration can be seen to have largely occurred in response to recruitment programmes promoted by destination countries. In recent times, by contrast, destination countries—except Germany—have not explicitly extended an invitation to new migrants, as their own economies have also suffered from the effects of the crisis. Whereas Southern European guest workers left countries that were barely or partially industrialized during most of the twentieth century, the new migrants are leaving their home countries after several decades of economic growth as EU-15 Member States. Unsurprisingly, the different socio-economic contexts in which old and new Southern European migration occurred are widely reflected in the socio-demographic profiles of citizens leaving during the crisis. As has been shown in Chap. 11, the current migrants from Southern Europe are on average better educated compared to their post-war predecessors. This is partly related to a general improvement in educational attainment in these societies as well as to the vulnerable situation of young adults in the labour market, who use migration as a coping strategy in times of crisis. However, even though the economic crisis has hit most severely segments of the population with low levels of human capital, highly skilled individuals are over-represented in the new flows of Southern European migrants because they are the ones who are able to better respond to the labour market needs of Northern EU Member States. In other words, although it is still unclear how well these new migrants are performing in the labour markets, the selectivity of flows according to

skills level shows that the transforming structure of demand for labour force in post-crisis Northern EU economies may play a crucial role in shaping current South-North flows.

Another important factor that determines the profile of current Southern European migrants is the decreasing role of networks in migration strategies. This feature contrasts clearly with previous waves of South-North migration, when the flows were managed on a collective basis within a framework of bilateral agreements. Current flows are now more individualized but also more dependent on migrants' skills characteristics and their capacity to adjust to the specific needs of Northern EU labour markets.

These trends should not hide the fact that, as shown in the country chapters, current South-North migration is far from being homogenous. While statistics on this matter are hard to collect, the different country chapters hint at the fact that a share of the new Southern European migration has had a previous migration experience. Indeed, some new Southern EU migrants are third country migrants who obtained citizenship in Southern Europe and either returned to their home country or moved North with the economic crisis.

Lastly, transformations between pre and post crisis in migration patterns are not uniformly visible in the case of Southern European countries. The case of Portugal differs significantly from others due to the larger volume of migration flow compared to its overall population. In addition, migration from Portugal seems to be less selective with regard to skills level. Unlike other Southern EU Member States, migration from Portugal has never ceased. Although the scarcity of data does not allow us to draw categorical conclusions, this fact may explain why the new flows of Portuguese emigrants are not so different from the previous ones.

### ***12.1.2 Lesson 2: Migration Is a Strategy Adopted by Citizens and States in Response to Crises***

As we have clearly shown in this volume, the level of mobility of citizens within the EU has significantly increased during the crisis but, overall, only a very small minority of EU citizens actually reside in a Member State other than their state of nationality, even after the crisis. Considering the harshness of the recession in most EU Member States, this data could be viewed as surprising. The case study of Greece, for instance, showed that the crisis triggered an increase in migration flows but that—in spite of a strong increase in unemployment—flows have remained somewhat limited in absolute terms.

Even though migration is a strategy adopted by some in response to the crisis, not all sectors of the population in Southern Europe have equal opportunities to emigrate. In this volume, we have placed particular emphasis on the process of labour market segmentation, which, even before the crisis, had been creating a strong disparity between different groups of workers in terms of protection. Italy and Greece

best exemplify this situation. Older workers there tend to hold long-term and stable contracts, while young cohorts of workers occupy mostly insecure, highly-flexible and low-paid jobs. This segmentation of the labour market in Southern Europe has been reinforced with the crisis since contracting and dismissal on the basis of fixed-term contracts have become more common.

Throughout this volume, we have thus demonstrated that migration is a strategy used by only some EU citizens to deal with the effects of the crisis. Others either do not need to take this approach, or make use of alternative strategies that do not entail physical mobility. Such strategies have been identified in the various case studies featured and they include housing strategies by which young adults return to live in the parental home or educational strategies consisting of delaying or suspending entry into the job market by resuming tertiary education. Reasons for choosing alternatives to migration include the fact that—in Southern Europe as in other parts of the world—migration is simply not an option that is available to all citizens who find themselves in a situation of vulnerability.

As shown in the case studies here, debates on the skills levels of new Southern EU migrants have strongly influenced the reaction of both sending and receiving countries to crisis migration. With regard to receiving countries, the case of Germany showed that limited skills, issues with the recognition of skills and a low level of language proficiency may still discourage would-be emigrants from leaving and may hinder the successful socio-economic integration of those who do emigrate. Yet, Germany's reaction also showed that encouraging immigration is a strategy followed by states in order to cope with the macro-economic and political effects of the crisis. Unlike France, Belgium and the United Kingdom, the German authorities clearly saw an opportunity within the crisis to attract highly-skilled workers, who are greatly needed in order to maintain the country's competitiveness. To this end, Germany has recruited workers from Southern Europe and provided them with training in order to facilitate their integration into the labour market. This strategy is, however, only a very partial response to Germany's labour force needs.

Sending countries, by contrast, have been less eager to promote emigration as a solution to unemployment. Unlike other periods in history when Southern European governments explicitly encouraged migration as a safety valve, they are now very reluctant to even acknowledge the existence of crisis-related migration. The Spanish government's insistence on describing new emigrants as "youngsters in search of adventure" is particularly telling in this respect. This attitude illustrates the dilemma in which Southern European governments find themselves with regard to crisis-related migration. On the one hand, these flows may marginally reduce the pressure on social assistance systems and improve unemployment statistics. On the other hand, explicitly encouraging emigration could be interpreted as a failure by the government to provide an adequate response to the crisis. As shown very clearly in the case of Greece, Portugal and Spain, debates on crisis-related emigration have often been used by political parties to open up larger debates on austerity and the management of the crisis. In other words, emigration data has been instrumental-

ized by political parties in sending countries to discuss the adequacy of macro-economic policy responses in times of crisis.

### ***12.1.3 Lesson 3: The Principle of Freedom of Circulation Does Not Apply Equally to All EU Citizens***

Freedom of circulation is one of the achievements of the European integration process that is most appreciated by EU citizens, in spite of variations in the levels of support for this policy across Member States. This right has never been absolute and safeguards have always existed to limit the freedom of circulation of undesirable EU migrants (e.g. criminals, the unemployed, etc.). With the crisis, Northern European Member States have made increasing use of those safeguards and have even called for further restrictions upon the freedom of circulation. Those states do not, however, uniformly target all EU citizens. Instead, a process of segmentation in access to freedom of circulation—which started before the crisis—has been progressively reinforced with the economic crisis. This segmentation process operates along three lines.

First, with regard to occupation, it is important to note that the mobility rights of pensioners and students have not at all been questioned in recent years. Also, within the category of EU workers, only highly-skilled workers have continued to remain desirable in the eyes of governments. As shown with the case of Italian associations in Brussels (see Chap. 7), highly-skilled migrants are also those who have access to the most resources to mobilize and react when their freedom of circulation is being contested. By contrast, posted workers, low-skilled EU workers and mobile unemployed EU citizens have been at the centre of many controversies in Northern European Member States. As we have shown in several chapters, these categories of migrants have been increasingly depicted as illegitimate EU movers, whose rights to circulation should be strongly limited. The most telling example of this discrepancy in the definition of legitimate EU mobility can be seen in the United Kingdom. In this country, discourses and policies are becoming increasingly hostile towards new EU migrants coming to work in the UK, while the right of retired British citizens to reside in France and in Southern Europe (and to access social services like health care in those countries) is not being contested.

Second, Nationality is the second line along which segmentation operates in EU citizens' use of freedom of circulation. Even after the lifting of the temporary restrictions on freedom of circulation, the mobility of Central and Eastern European EU citizens has usually been more contentious than that of Southern Europeans. The sizeable difference in flows provides an explanation for this different perception. Most importantly however, populist and xenophobic political parties of several Member States have used the cliché of the “invasion of Central and Eastern European migrants” for over a decade in order to justify their anti-migration stance. The “Polish plumber” in France, the “Polish butcher” in Germany or the “Romanian

construction worker” in Belgium are the best examples of this rhetorical effort to associate perceived negative effects of EU migration with specific nationalities of EU citizens.

Southern EU citizens have been affected by restrictive policies applied to all EU citizens in times of crisis. These policies undermine their ability to make use of their freedom of circulation in Northern Europe. But, in the cases we reviewed, only in the United Kingdom did we find explicit negative references made by policy-makers towards new Southern Europeans. Underlying this, and this is the third line of segmentation, is the fact that the history of migration has benefited Southern European migrants more than those from Central and Eastern European when they moved in times of economic crisis. Long-established Southern European migrant communities did not necessarily generate a higher level of intra-community solidarity between old and new migrants. Yet, new Southern European migrant communities, such as the Italians in Belgium or the Portuguese in France, have often had a comparative advantage when dealing with attacks on their freedom of circulation: they are able to benefit from long-established homeland institutions and organizations (i.e. political parties, trade unions, immigrant associations, etc.) based in receiving countries. Such organizations specialize in defending immigrant rights and have built significant connections over the years with other institutions and organizations based in destination countries. The mobilization of civil society organizations against the removal of residence permits from Southern Europeans living in Belgium, who are much less affected by this policy than Central Eastern European migrants, is a very telling example of this discrepancy.

#### ***12.1.4 Lesson 4: Welfare Is an Instrument for Controlling and Delegitimizing EU Migration***

Another key lesson of this volume is that social policy, and welfare in particular, are increasingly being used by Member States to limit the arrival of the afore-mentioned category of “illegitimate EU migrants”. The British and Belgian case studies underlined the fear held by Member States of seeing EU migrants abuse their welfare systems. In both cases, those fears have led to important policy decisions, whose consequences have been to restrict access to welfare for mobile EU citizens. The context of crisis, and its associated discourse regarding the need for austerity measures to bring public expenditure under control, has greatly helped the implementation of those measures. The crisis has enabled policy-makers to frame a discourse on the inability of Member States to respond to the social protection needs of all foreigners, and of EU citizens in particular. Restricting the access of mobile EU citizens to social protection does not serve exclusively to reduce welfare spendings. In practice, it delegitimizes EU migrants by creating a consistent link between EU

migration and “benefit tourism” in spite of the evidence demonstrating that this practice is marginal.

In addition to decreasing social protection, we have seen that social policy has also become an alternative form of migration policy. As the EU treaties and legislation leave Member States with little power to limit the freedom of circulation of citizens, controlling EU migrants’ access to welfare has become a new way for states to filter undesirable migrants. During the 2015 general election campaign and the “Brexit” campaign in the United Kingdom, the centrality of the debate on EU citizens’ access to welfare was very telling of this move towards a management of EU migration through welfare. Also, in recent years, Member States have similarly paid growing attention to Directive 2004/38/EC on the right to free movement of EU citizens, which allows states to remove the residence permits of EU citizens who represent an “unreasonable burden on the social system” of their country of residence. The Belgium case study showed how radical the change of policy has been in this matter following the financial and economic crisis. Having moved on from expelling only a handful of citizens on the basis of the directive in 2007, Belgium has subsequently been expelling around 2,500 EU citizens every year since 2012. Interestingly, Belgium’s policy sends a clear signal to newcomers and would-be EU immigrants to the country: using social protection may serve as a basis for removing their residence permit if those migrants are believed to cost more than they contribute to the Belgian social protection system. While future rulings of the European Court of Justice may revoke or set limits on the Belgian policy, this example shows how far the implementation of social policies may act as a filter to keep undesirable EU migrants out.

### ***12.1.5 Lesson 5: We Need to Talk About Brain Gain and Brain Drain Within the EU!***

In Europe, migration and development scholars have traditionally been concerned with issues of brain drain, but studies have focused mostly on the impact of the phenomenon on non-European sending states fearful of losing their highly-educated citizens to the benefit of the EU labour market. In the four Southern European countries studied in this volume, we have, however, noted that policy-makers have expressed concerns about a possible South-North internal brain drain being triggered or intensified by the crisis. As shown in this volume, there is some evidence of strong participation of highly-skilled workers among the new emigrants, but given the limited volume of the outflow, it is still too early to talk about human capital flight or brain drain.

The fear of losing the best-educated citizens seems to be largely shared in Southern Europe, with the possible exception of Spain, where the very idea of crisis-related migration has long been repudiated by the Conservative government, whilst at the same time being emphasized by opposition parties. Among the expected negative outcomes of the current waves of emigration, there is the risk that Southern

European countries will find themselves with a lack of a skilled workforce when the economic situation improves. This obviously opens up space for debates about the legitimacy of high-skilled worker recruitment programmes within the EU, such as Germany's "Job of my Life". Indeed, even though this programme may offer relief to a very limited number of Southern European unemployed citizens (and their governments), questions remain regarding the long-term macro-economic effects of this loss of work force, whose training was paid for by the sending country's taxpayers.

Beyond espousing discourses, the Portuguese, Spanish and Greek governments have done very little to tackle the issue of brain drain. Only the Italian authorities seem to have tried hard to address the issue with specific policy measures such as tax incentives, pension benefits, access to social housing and seed money programmes for highly-skilled returnees. In the three other cases, no real policy response has been offered to what is described by many within the national political arena as an issue of critical importance. Italy's approach can be explained by a long tradition of engagement with its citizens abroad, which has seen the development of a very thorough system of representations of emigrants' interests in the home country. Such a system, associated with a strong representation abroad of Italian institutions and associations (i.e. political parties and trade unions) has kept the issue of emigration and brain drain on the political agenda for over a decade. By contrast, Greece has historically had a more ambivalent attitude towards its citizens living abroad and has engaged with them to a much lesser extent. It is particularly noteworthy, for instance, that Greek migrants remain one of the few groups of EU citizens who are deprived of external voting rights in their home country elections (Lafleur 2013). Engaging with citizens abroad should, however, be of crucial importance for sending state authorities in the current socio-economic environment for at least two reasons. First and foremost, growing xenophobia and limits on access to social protection in destination countries is placing a growing number of their emigrants in a position of vulnerability. Accordingly, not only do new Southern EU migrants sometimes need assistance, but they also need their home country governments to enter into a dialogue with Northern European governments when their rights are being jeopardized while living abroad. Second, if Southern European Member States are serious about involving return migrants in economic recovery efforts, a dialogue needs to be opened rapidly with crisis-related emigrants regarding the policies that would facilitate their return to their home country.

## **12.2 Conclusion: Moving Research and Political Agendas Forward**

This collaborative book is one of the first attempts to assess comprehensively and systematically the main features of crisis-driven South-North EU migration. Even though we have explored the impact of this phenomenon on public debates and



political agendas in selected sending and receiving countries, several questions still require further research efforts and in-depth reflection.

This volume has shown clearly that more systematic and rigorous statistical data is needed in order to obtain a more complete and detailed picture of the current migratory phenomenon in Europe. Similarly, this book has demonstrated the added-value of conducting focused research with international research teams based both in immigrants' countries of origin and destination.

This book opens the way for explorations of several issues that have not as yet been addressed. One of the most important issues is probably the long-term insertion of new Southern European migrants into Northern EU Member States and its connections with the large-scale East-West post-accession migration. Throughout the book, it has been hypothesized that the patterns of labour market insertion of migrants from the new accession countries is one of the factors that explains the increasing selectivity in the new flows of South-North migration. However, more research is needed to understand the reciprocal influence of these on the type of contemporary EU migrations (Kaczmarczyk and Stanek 2015). Examining these interactions would not only shed new light on the complex map of current intra-EU mobility, it would also help us understand the causal mechanisms that lie behind these newer patterns of migration.

In this volume, we have also argued that the full re-establishment of the old South-North migratory route depends on a hypothetical continuing divergence in economic performance between Northern and Southern EU Member States. If the crisis remains strong in the South but eases in the North, rising demand for labour may increase Southern European flows. However, the current economic performance in the Northern EU Member States under study here revealed that the demand for labour is at present insufficient to trigger a complete revival of the post-war South-North migratory route.

Future trends of internal mobility within the EU will depend not only on future economic performances but also on the evolution of the anti-migration sentiment in Northern European societies. As described in this volume, restrictions on migration from other EU28 countries are either currently under discussion or have already been implemented in several Northern EU Member States. As the growing animosity towards new migrants is being publicized in the Southern European media, potential new migrants may be discouraged from making use of their right to circulation. In addition, the large influx of asylum seekers since the Spring of 2015 and the "Brexit" referendum further demonstrated that immigration is likely to remain a topic of contention in the EU in the coming years, even if the economic situation improves. The impact of the asylum crisis and of the "Brexit" vote on the freedom of circulation of EU citizens is hard to determine at this stage. However, this situation indicates that the European Union will be facing the difficult task of reflecting simultaneously on its asylum policy and its internal mobility policy in the coming years.

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