BACKGROUND PAPER
WMR 2010
The Future of European Migration:
Policy Options for the European Union
and its Member States
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BACKGROUND PAPER
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The Future of European Migration: Policy Options for the European Union and its Member States

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FOREWORD

This paper is one of 19 background papers which have been prepared for the IOM, 2010 World Migration Report which is entitled the “Future of Migration: Building Capacities for Change”. The 2010 report focuses on likely future trends in migration and the capacities that will be required by States, regional and international organizations, civil society and the private sector to manage migration successfully over the coming decades.

Over the next few decades, international migration is likely to transform in scale, reach and complexity, due to growing demographic disparities, the effects of environmental change, new global political and economic dynamics, technological revolutions and social networks.

The 2010 World Migration Report focuses on capacity-building, first because it is good governance to plan for the future, especially during a period of economic downturn when the tendency is to focus on immediate impacts and the short-term period of recovery. Second, capacity-building is widely acknowledged to be an essential component of effective migration management, helping to ensure the orderly and humane management of migration.

Part A of the World Migration Report 2010 focuses on identifying core capacities in key areas of migration management. The aim is not to recommend “one size fits all” policies and practices, but to suggest objectives of migration management policies in each area, to stimulate thinking and provide examples of what States and other actors can do.

Part B of the World Migration Report 2010, provides an overview of the latest global and regional trends in migration. In recognition of the importance of the largest global economic recession since the 1930s, this section has a particular focus on the effects of this crisis on migrants, migration and remittances.

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MIGRATION WITHIN AND TO EUROPE

In 2010, the European Union (EU) had 500 million inhabitants – more than ever before. Over the last decade, the EU experienced a population growth of some 2 million people per year; 80 per cent of this growth was due to gains from international migration – a remarkable change of trends, given that Europe (until the mid-1980s) had more emigration than immigration. At the same time, mobility between EU Member States has also increased.

Stock of foreign-born residents

Forty-eight million people residing in the EU (EU27) or in the four directly associated countries¹ are regular international migrants. They represent 9.4 per cent of Western and Central Europe’s total population.² Some 15 million of these migrants have come from other EU Member States (in some cases, prior to the EU accession of their home countries) (UNDESA, 2009; IOM, 2010). The remaining 33 million have come from other parts of Europe and other world regions (Eurostat, 2009b). Among them, some 21 million residents of Europe are immigrants from Asia, the Middle East and North-Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. Over the past decade, the main migrant-sending countries within Europe were Poland, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine.

A comparison of all countries of Western and Central Europe shows that, in absolute terms, Germany has by far the largest foreign-born population, followed by France, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy. Relative to population size, however, two of Europe’s smallest countries (Luxembourg and Liechtenstein) have the largest stock of immigrants, followed by Switzerland, Ireland, Cyprus, Austria and Latvia. In these, the foreign-born population accounts for 15–30 per cent of the total population, whereas the West European average is 11 per cent. Among the EU Member States in Central and south-eastern Europe, Latvia and Estonia have the highest share of foreign-born residents, followed by Slovenia and the Czech Republic.

Recent migration flows within EU27

EU and European Economic Area (EEA) citizens are more or less free to move within Western and Central Europe, to take up residence and to join the workforce in any other EU/EEA Member States.³ Some restrictions, however, apply to citizens of new EU Member States seeking employment in another EU country.⁴

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¹ Multilateral association with EU27 within the framework of the European Economic Area (EEA): Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway (other EEA); bilateral association with EU27: Switzerland.
² UNDESA (2009), IOM (2010).
³ And to Switzerland (which is affiliated to the EU via bilateral treaties).
⁴ Transitional restrictions for citizens of countries that joined the EU in 2004 have been phased out by almost all “old” EU Member States (except Austria and Germany, which will lift them in 2011). Restrictions for citizens of countries that joined the EU in 2007 (Bulgaria, Romania) will end in December 2013.
Labour migrants, particularly those from countries with lower wage levels (such as Poland, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Romania), make use of the freedom of movement and access to Western European labour markets – particularly in Italy, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Recent migration flows between third countries and EU27

During the last decade, the net flow from third countries to the EU was 1.5–2 million people per year. These figures neither include intra-EU mobility nor irregular flows. Gains from international migration accounted for 80–90 per cent of the EU’s total population growth.

The key gates of entry for people immigrating to the EU are temporary and long-term labour migration, family reunion⁵ and family formation, the inflow of asylum-seekers and the inflow of co-ethnic “return” migrants and their dependent family members.⁶ These aspects, however, do not account for all relevant migration flows – for example, in several EU countries, economic migration occurs to a larger extent in the form of seasonal and temporary labour migration (some 600,000 persons were admitted annually in EU27) (OECD, 2009), as well as in the form of irregular labour migration.

Since the year 2000, labour migration has been the most important gate of entry in countries such as Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. Other countries of Western Europe experienced a continuous flow of migrants seeking to reunite with their family. Ethnic migration – particularly to Germany, Greece and Hungary – decreased, as did the inflow of asylum-seekers (with only 240,000 applications filed in all EU countries in 2008, as compared to some 750,000 in 1992) (UNHCR, 2009).

Also since 2000, Italy and Spain recorded by far the largest net inflows of migrants, followed by France, Germany, Greece, Ireland and the United Kingdom. Within Europe, between 2000 and 2006, net outflows were largest in Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and Turkey. Ukraine also emerged as source significant new migrant-sending country.

Following the general trend, most EU/EEA countries (including several new EU Member States) have become net immigration countries. It is very likely that, sooner or later, this will be the case in other new EU Member States and candidate countries⁷ as well. In contrast to this demographic reality, many Europeans do not see their homelands as immigration countries – or, at least, not as destinations for permanent immigrants.

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⁵ In most EU countries, family reunion is restricted to spouses and minor children. For third-country nationals, various age limits apply.

⁶ In the recent past, these two related inflows were of particular relevance for countries such as Germany (ethnic German Aussiedler), Greece (Pontian Greeks) and Hungary (ethnic Hungarians).

⁷ Current EU candidate countries are Croatia, Macedonia and Turkey.
EUROPEAN MIGRATION POLICIES: DIVERGENT PATTERNS AND COMMON APPROACHES

National migration policies

Given the diversity of Europe’s national labour markets, existing immigration stocks and historical migration patterns, it is not surprising that European governments diverge significantly in terms of their migration policies. This has a number of implications for both the EU as a whole and its Member States.

The historical starting point has had an impact on current policies. Countries with a longer history of immigration – whether through temporary migration programmes (such as those in Austria, Germany and Switzerland), or historical ties with former colonies (such as in Belgium, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) – tend to focus more on placing conditions upon immigrants and/or restricting immigration flows. This may be due to the fact that, over the past couple of decades, the nature of migration flows has evolved less as a result of deliberate policy choices than unanticipated developments. An enduring number of asylum claims (which peaked during the early 1990s and have since decreased significantly), ongoing family reunification and an increased mobility between EU Member States are reminders that “zero immigration” policies are not a realistic goal.

It also reflects the fact that European countries are not developing migration policies for the first time, but revising and reforming these policies on the basis of their own or shared experiences. For example, the United Kingdom has undergone numerous changes in its approach towards economic migration, culminating in the adoption of a type of points system, creating tiers for migrant workers according to skill and national need. In France, there were several legislative changes made to family reunification policy in 2003 and 2006, in an effort to stem flows of family migrants to the country. Sweden totally overhauled its system in 2008 and now offers Swedish employers the possibility of recruiting labour and skills from third countries, with minimal government interference.

At the same time, many countries of Europe are revising their strategies towards integrating immigrants, frequently in explicit recognition that preceding policies have not been as successful as initially hoped. The Netherlands is a good example of this. The ministry responsible for integration has changed several times over the last decade – most recently, in 2006, from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment – and an explicit shift away from the laissez-faire multicultural approach that predominated in the country until the late 1990s.

A number of the Western European countries, including Finland, Ireland, Greece, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom, which remained countries of emigration for most of the twentieth century, tended to have a less restrictive approach to migration – particularly labour migration. However, in some of these countries, this is also linked to lack of experience and, in some cases, a lack of policy.
Both immigration flows and policy development have been on the rise over the past decade. Some of the resulting policies reflect a creative approach and also draw from experiences and lessons learned in other European countries. In Ireland, an employer-led and skills-blind work-permit system gave way to a more selective shortage-list system, and then to a more sophisticated employment-permit system in 2006, which created a form of Green Card and a system for intra-corporate transferees (workers who move country, but remain employed within the same multi-national corporation). In Spain, frequent regularizations have occurred over the past few decades, combined with reasonably simple labour and family reunion policies. However, in the wake of the economic crisis, policy-makers looked for ways to reduce high levels of immigrant unemployment by offering to pay accrued social security benefits in a lump sum for those migrants willing to return home.

In several of the countries of Central and south-eastern Europe that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, migration flows have been dominated by emigration – particularly in the Baltic States, Bulgaria, Poland and Romania. Others, such as the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia, are becoming increasingly attractive to migrants from both other EU countries and third countries. Yet the new EU Member States have few comprehensive policies in place for managing this change.

Some of the countries most affected by emigration to other EU Member States (notably Lithuania and Poland) have implemented strategies to encourage return, whereas the Czech Republic, which considered high-skilled migration a priority, has implemented several strategies to attract qualified migrants and those with needed skills. However, for many of the new EU Member States and, most recently, Bulgaria and Romania, the priority has been to transpose and implement EU legislation on immigration, asylum, border and visa policy, rather than focusing on national strategies.

Economics has also played a part. Those countries experiencing stronger economic growth during the 1990s and early 2000s (such as Ireland, Spain and the United Kingdom) were more inclined to encourage labour migration from both within and outside the EU. Conversely, Germany cited both high unemployment and continued immigration of third-country nationals as a reason for limiting intra-EU movement of workers and for imposing restrictions on third-country workers.

Geography and the characteristics of bordering countries have also played a strong role in determining European policy approaches. Those countries with long geographically accessible “external” borders (notably in Southern and Eastern Europe) have a much greater preoccupation with border management than those Schengen countries\(^8\) whose only remaining external borders within the EU are at international airports and sea ports. In Southern Europe, this has resulted in a loose alliance of Member States (between Cyprus, Italy, Malta and Spain) who have made several pleas to their EU peers to share the burden of external border control in the Mediterranean. While Member States to the east (notably Poland) have similar concerns, this is supplemented by the desire to retain good relations

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with contiguous, non-EU countries, such as Ukraine and Moldova, by not sealing off their common borders.

No two national immigration policies in Europe are the same. However, a number of trends have emerged within the EU, many of which were encapsulated in the European Pact on Immigration and asylum agreed under the French Presidency in October 2008 (Council of the European Union, 2008; see Collett (2008) for details of the pact itself).

Firstly, countries have shown great interest in “selected” immigration, whereby those migrants deemed more likely to contribute economically are selected. The concept of selected immigration has been articulated most explicitly in France, where it applies not only to selecting economic migrants, but also to ensuring that family migrants are prepared for, and capable of, integrating into French society. For most countries, selection tends to slant labour migration policies towards the highly skilled, whether through a points system, a green card or an employer-led system. Such programmes are designed not only to identify skills (mostly through screening salary and education levels), but also to create attractive conditions for those migrants, whether through simplified procedures, immediate family reunion rights, or fast-tracked permanent residence. In some countries, such as Ireland and the United Kingdom, intra-EU economic migration is thought to be sufficient to fill gaps at the lower skill levels, while labour migration policies are focused exclusively on highly skilled and in-demand workers.

A European comparison illustrates the variation among EU Member States regarding the entry procedures for third-country highly skilled workers based on work and residency permits. Some Member States, such as Austria, Latvia and Estonia, used quota systems, while others relied mainly on labour market demand (Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom). Italy used both procedures, while Germany did not use any of these procedures. Some Member States also required language skills (Estonia, Latvia) or used a system whereby the employers could assess the necessary language ability (Austria, Ireland, Italy, Germany, Greece, Sweden and the United Kingdom). The United Kingdom’s Points-Based System (PBS) introduced knowledge of English as a formal requirement (EMN, 2007: 4–5).

In addition, some of the Member States also had fast-track programmes for admission (Ireland, Italy, Greece and the Netherlands) in order to respond quickly to specific labour market demand in specific occupations. The United Kingdom had also a scheme (the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme) that allowed an applicant to enter without a concrete job offer, which would otherwise be the expected prerequisite for entry with work permits. Some Member States (Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands) also used special programmes to recruit and facilitate the entrance of highly skilled workers from third countries as part of broader visa or work permit schemes that were designed to give various advantages to highly skilled workers (EMN, 2007).

Two countries – Luxemburg and Sweden – are giving employers a large margin of manoeuvre in the process of recruitment and admission of labour migrants coming from third countries. Alongside this economic selection, there is a growing tendency in Europe to develop mandatory integration programmes at the national level (usually language training and general government or history classes), and to put soft limits on transnational family formation and family reunification, based on minimal age at marriage, minimal language
competency, pre-departure preparations and civics literacy testing. These are designed to promote better integration outcomes, by ensuring that new arrivals have basic language skills and a sufficient understanding of their new country of residence, though it has been suggested that this might be another form of immigration selection (Carrera, 2006). In some countries, limits on family reunification are designed to address marriage fraud or forced marriages.

Secondly, there has been a renewed interest in the concept of circular migration, based on the premise of maximizing economic benefit, while minimizing social impacts. While this has yet to become a broad tenet of many European immigration policies, pilot programmes have emerged in a number of EU Member States (such as France, Spain and Portugal) and are planned in several others (such as Germany and the Netherlands). In addition, the ethos of circular migration, with its emphasis on temporary mobility, can be seen in a number of policies designed to promote the eventual return of migrants – from seasonal workers to retirees. Unlike the temporary migration programmes of previous decades, these rely more on providing incentives for temporary or permanent return rather than enforcing it. How such a policy fits together with the growing interest in better integration has yet to be fully thought through in policy circles.

Finally, several EU Member States have begun to introduce tougher criteria for acquiring citizenship. In some countries, this means that migrants must wait longer before applying for citizenship; in others, it means passing language and civics literacy tests. This development responds to a growing sense of identity unease across Europe, and a perception that, in the past, integration strategies have not succeeded.

**EFFORTS TO FORGE A COMMON PATH**

The EU immigration pact, mentioned above, set out a range of political priorities for the EU, including selected immigration and the need to set out the rights and responsibilities of European migrants. The text also highlights the importance of immigration to Europe, and the need for common approaches – if not policies – to be adopted by European governments. Similarly, successive statements from European Summits highlight the relevance of migration to the future of Europe and to its global competitiveness.

However, after a decade of EU policy development – from the original Tampere Programme (1999), via the Hague Programme (2004), to the current Stockholm Programme (2009) – progress remains patchy. In short, efforts to collaborate on border control and irregular migration have been more successful, while any attempts to forge a common system for legal migration have largely stalled. As a result, a new approach has emerged, focused on the development of cooperative relationships with non-EU countries (Collett, 2009).

The EU has already established a common (Schengen) visa system and is well on the way to completing an Integrated Border Management System, with the development of a common border code, numerous information systems, and an agency (Frontex) mandated to coordinate European efforts to stem unauthorized border crossing.
Meanwhile, the common agenda for legal migration – particularly economic migration – remains minimal and piecemeal. Some important standards have been set down – for example, the conditions of entry and residence of family migrants and long-term residents – but the so-called flagship EU Blue Card Directive, aimed at attracting highly skilled workers, has been diluted to the point of irrelevance, and efforts to create an EU framework directive for migrant workers’ rights remain contentious to EU Member States.

The development of various dialogues with non-EU countries has been the major focus of policy activity since 2005. Broadly, these dialogues are designed to find common priorities between the EU and third countries for cooperating on immigration management, though critics highlight the disproportionate focus on border control and irregular migration while regular migration programmes only play a minor role. In reality, the EU cannot offer much in return for external cooperation from neighbouring States and beyond. Two pilot mobility partnerships – with Cape Verde and Moldova – mark a departure in approach, but bear little resemblance to the types of bilateral arrangements seen at the national level.

Essentially, the levels of international and intra-EU cooperation on legal migration highlight the current lack of focused collective political will among the Member States. Less frequently articulated, though no less relevant, is the fact that looming demographic change will result in EU Member States competing against each other for those migrants deemed desirable commodities, regardless of how much as they collaborate on policy.

**WHAT KIND OF MIGRATION POLICIES DOES EUROPE NEED?**

**Short-term policy options**

As a space without frontiers between its Member States, the European Union and Schengen Member States need both credible joint border and visa management and a common European immigration policy. Control of the EU’s external borders and coordination of visa systems are essential elements for the proper functioning of such a policy. But as tens of millions of third-country nationals lawfully cross the EU’s external borders every year (most of whom have no intention of settling in the EU), necessary control and verification mechanisms cannot primarily take place at these borders. EU Member States have to make sure that legal immigrants get admitted and registered, receive residence permits, and can join the regular labour force or enrol in higher education. This requires appropriate admission and verification systems, but also a crack-down on illegal employment and the exploitation of migrant workers.

The Stockholm Programme, which sets out the next five years of work towards developing EU immigration policies, does not envisage any major steps forward (Council of the European Union, 2009). Instead, the programme focuses on consolidating and rationalizing existing legislation (such as establishing minimum standards for the entry and residence of various categories of legal migrants) and developing tools for monitoring and assessing needs in the
various labour markets of the EU27. The most important aspect of this is the prioritizing of several essential building blocks for successful common policies, such as improving mechanisms for the recognition of third-country qualifications.

While many of the actions will have positive effects in the long term, there are no plans to develop collaborative immigration policies beyond the existing parameters. Indeed, while the Lisbon Treaty brings legal immigration policy within the ordinary legislative procedure (formerly known as co-decision), EU Member States retain critical control over determining the “volumes of admission of third-country nationals coming from third countries to their territory in order to seek work”. This limits the scope of the proposals that can be made by the European Commission.

Ambitious and forward-looking policies are difficult to foresee in the EU sphere. The experience of negotiating the Blue Card legislation in 2009 brought home to many EU Member States the fact that they are increasingly competing against, rather than collaborating with, other Member States for the most desirable migrant workers. However, the scale of demographic change outlined in this paper suggests that Europe will need to think bigger with respect to immigration, and not just in terms of selected immigration.

Long-term policy options

Life expectancy in most EU Member States is currently at its highest level in recorded history – on average, 75 years for men and 82 for women – and it will increase by an additional 15 to 20 years during the twenty-first century. Today, on average, women in Europe give birth to 1.5 children, while the proportion of women without children is growing. As a result, Europe’s population is ageing and will result in a decline in native-born labour forces. Without future immigration, the working age population (15–64 years), which is currently at 333 million, would drop to 242 million in 2050 (a decline of 91 million), while the number of people actually working or seeking employment would decline from 239 million to 171 million (~68 million) at current labour force participation levels (see Münz, 2009, based on Eurostat, 2009a).

Adopting proactive immigration policies will be part of the answer to the ageing and ultimately shrinking labour forces in the years to come. The options available internally to the EU (more women joining the labour force, higher retirement age, increased fertility levels), even if they can be realized, are not sufficient in themselves to address the consequences of demographic change. As mentioned above, in the unlikely absence of immigration, and with sustained labour force participation, the EU labour force will, by 2050, dramatically decline by around 68 million workers. As not all immigrants become economically active, a net gain of some 100 million people would eventually be needed to plug the gap (Münz, 2009). From today’s point of view, such a large net intake over the next 40 years is unlikely. It is therefore clear that, while the intake of immigrants will necessarily be part of the solution to labour and skill shortages, it needs to be seen as a complement to all the other measures mentioned.

POLICY OPTIONS FOR THE EU AND NECESSARY CAPACITY-BUILDING

According to the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union now has a bigger role to play in developing common European immigration policies. However, there is no consensus over what exactly that role should be. Given the scale of the demographic challenge facing Europe, it has been suggested that the EU is the only actor capable of finding sufficient solutions through cooperative action, while others believe that the EU should limit itself to facilitating European governments in their efforts. The various options for EU policy development, the attendant advantages or disadvantages, and the capacities the EU will have to acquire in order to be effective are addressed in the following sections.

a) EU as colloquium

In the short to medium term, it looks as if EU Member States will continue to operate at a strictly national level with respect to immigration of third-country nationals. This avoids the difficult issues associated with intra-EU mobility rights for newly-arriving third-country nationals, and the challenges thrown up by continuing labour market disparities across Europe. In this context, the EU can limit itself to being the focal point for discussing common challenges and exchanging ideas on possible policy solutions as well as experiences with implemented policies.

There is already some evidence that EU Member States are learning from each other’s successes and, more pertinently, their failures. Having a forum for free and open discussion, without the pressure to commit to further collaboration, would seem to be the ideal solution for those countries that believe immigration should remain an entirely national prerogative. Indeed, the emerging gap between the rhetoric of successive European Summit meetings highlighting the need for collaborative action and the joint policy action that subsequently emerges suggests that the Member States see no need for further capacity-building at the EU level.

However, without a common, simple set of immigration policies for potential migrants, which would offer access to the whole of the EU27, the European Union may be losing out to North America and Asia in scaling up its potential competitive advantage. For a non-European, navigating 27 different immigration systems, each with multiple channels of immigration, would be challenging and might appear less attractive than dealing with the US or Canadian immigration system.

b) EU as facilitator

In order to effectively assess emerging immigration trends and priorities, it is necessary to have good, comparable sources of information. The EU has played a significant role in finding common ground in terms of terminology and data collection (Council of the European Union, 2007) and the development of common databases, such as the Schengen Information System (SIS) and Eurodac (designed to collect fingerprints and information on asylum-seekers to the European Union).
There are plans to keep building information systems within the European Union, from the establishment of an EU-wide entry–exit system, to the development of migration profiles for significant sending and transit third countries. In addition to this, the EU Commission has been mandated in the Stockholm Programme to assess future skills and labour market needs in order to support Member States in developing their own strategies for economic immigration.

The EU Commission already has the capacity to fulfil this role, although it relies greatly on the collection of reliable data at the national level to ensure accuracy. However, concerns about data protection (including data privacy) remain.

**c) Harmonized migration policies**

In the future, it is clear that some EU Member States will have to consider labour immigration strategies in more depth – particularly the terms of residence, integration strategies and perhaps incentives to attract those skills they need most.

EU Member States have the option of further developing policies according to the current EU approach: harmonizing common terms for entry and residence, along with common rights, for various categories of third-country nationals.\(^{10}\) Such an approach might also benefit from including mobility rights, allowing newly-arriving third-country nationals the freedom to move around the European Union for work. This would need to go hand in hand with efforts to facilitate a higher degree of mobility within the European Union, such as improving the portability of social security rights, ensuring that qualifications are recognized across the continent, and common policies for accessing citizenship.

Offering mobility rights to third-country nationals remains extremely politically contentious. A clause offering such rights to highly skilled migrants was removed from the Blue Card legislation during negotiations, as EU Member States realized that such rights might compromise their control over volumes of admission of third-country migrants. Certainly, some countries are more attractive than others, whether due to employment opportunities, lifestyles or language. At root, disparities in average national wages between countries, and social rights associated with employment, mean that some countries have a stronger pull factor than others who may find themselves continually looking for new arrivals. Reducing labour market disparities is a long-term process, which will not be resolved through immigration policy.

The challenge of increasing portability of pension, health and other social rights, combined with the complexity of developing recognition of qualifications on a potentially global basis, is daunting; however, it is a necessary precondition for a harmonized approach. Without some parity internally, there is little point in developing harmonized external immigration policies. Thus far, regulatory work with respect to both portability and qualifications recognition has been arduous, but the experience has established both common ground and a basis for how to extend such benefits to third-country migrants at the EU level. However, these are both long-term policy objectives. Given the slow development of intra-EU mechanisms for dealing with both, it is likely that the timeline will be measured in decades rather than years.

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\(^{10}\) Examples include family reunification, long-term residence and highly skilled migration.
**d) EU as migration “manager”**

A far more ambitious role, and one that has gained ground with the development of the Global Approach to Migration,¹¹ is that the EU can play a role in brokering and managing migration programmes with third countries. There are several variables associated with this, such as whether participation of Member States would be on a voluntary basis, and whether programmes would be based on quotas or conditions of entry. There are at least two ways that the EU can approach this:

**Large-scale circular migration programmes**

One of the ideas that have gained ground within the EU in recent years is that of circular migration (European Commission, 2007). Despite interest among EU Member States, efforts to integrate circular migration into European policy have been limited to discussion of visa policies for seasonal workers, and specific third-country initiatives through mobility partnerships. Developing a broad-based and flexible circular migration regime may not resolve the demographic challenges facing Europe, but would offer migrants the opportunity to retain links with their home countries and to move back and forth at will. The hope from the policymaker perspective is that circular migration become the flexible valve in the immigration system, filling gaps in the labour market, but not adding to social costs, particularly upon retirement. Circular migration can also deal with changing labour market needs, bringing in different skills at different moments rather than embarking on expensive re-skilling strategies. The EU would, in essence, scale up the ambitions of the EU Member States and could manage the circular migration process through visa policies, as well as via labour-matching and cooperation with third countries.

Some of the advantages, as perceived by policymakers, may not exist in reality. Certainly, there are question marks over how far current circular migration strategies can be scaled up at the European level. In addition, the number of migrants required to complement Europe’s declining native labour force is already high. If, as detailed above, Europe will need some 68 million additional workers over the next 40 years, then widespread use of circular migration policies (depending on the form they take) would imply that two to three times that number of migrant workers would need to be found to fill the gap in the workforce. Is it questionable whether the potential migrant pool is large enough to do this effectively and whether cohesive communities could be developed to effectively deal with the challenges of ageing and ultimately shrinking populations.

**Bilateral and regional programmes**

So far, the Global Approach to Migration has led to the EU forging several mobility partnerships with third countries to ensure closer cooperation on migration.¹² These partnerships have been small-scale, with very little legal migration involved, partly due to the priorities of those partners themselves. However, it is open to the EU, should the European Commission obtain the blessing of the Member States to negotiate labour migration programmes with countries neighbouring on the European Union. While countries to the east

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¹² The two pilot programmes are with Cape Verde and Moldova, with whom partnership agreements were signed in 2008.
of Europe are facing similar demographic challenges as the EU27, countries to the south – from Turkey to Morocco – are still experiencing considerable demographic growth. Negotiating bilateral arrangements with these countries (including the exchange of professionals, and European investment in third-country education systems) may provide the EU with a ready source of labour at all skill levels, with high potential for mobility. Aside from the political reluctance to engage with these countries on substantive migration issues beyond border control and support for asylum systems, it is difficult to see the European Commission managing large-scale migration programmes with third countries. Who would manage such programmes and who would select participants? Does the EU or do its Member States have the capacity for this?

**CONCLUSIONS**

Clearly, in the future, Europe is going to have to work harder at resolving the challenges raised by future demographic and labour market changes, which include addressing its long-term labour market and immigration needs. However, there are several critical barriers currently facing policymakers across Europe.

- **Negative public and political perceptions of migration**: Migration is perceived as a problem rather than a solution across Europe. Not only does this limit the range of policies that can be adopted across Europe, but it also limits the scope of any EU cooperation with third countries. Without widespread public support and understanding of how and why immigration policies are implemented, envisaging large-scale immigration will be difficult. EU communication with citizens on immigration is, at best, perfunctory and mostly absent.

- **Difficulty defining future labour needs and developing an adaptable labour market**: It is still difficult for individual regions and countries to effectively identify changing labour market needs and develop a combination of policies that include immigration, in order to address them. The EU lacks the database, the tools and a common methodology for doing so, although this is part of the current European Commission work agenda.

- **Inadequate capacities to attract talent and skills**: Most EU Member States lack the capacity to recruit or select talent and skills from a large base of potential migrants. Existing consular services are usually not fit for that purpose. The same is true for labour and interior ministries that issue work and residence permits but lack experience in implementing proactive migration policies.

- **Difficulty developing integration strategies to cope with large-scale social mobility and change**: European governments are still struggling to find an effective mix of integration policies, the vast majority of which are targeted at long-term immigrants, with the ultimate goal of citizenship. While having a long-term horizon is positive for many migrants, integration strategies have yet to adapt to the needs of short-term residents, a high level of turnover in migrant populations, and the particular challenges of urban mobility. The EU and its
Member States need to resolve conflicting policy goals when developing both circular migration and comprehensive integration models that may not fit together.

- Without addressing these cross-cutting policy deficits, European governments and the EU as a whole will struggle to adopt immigration policies that can respond effectively to future demographic and labour supply challenges, regardless of which strategy is adopted.
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