NEW OECD/SOPEMI* REPORT ON TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Recent migration trends in the OECD countries must be seen against the wider trend towards an acceleration and globalisation of flows. But at the same time the old patterns, particularly as regards regional concentration, remain strong and predominate. Although intra-OECD flows, notably flows of skilled labour, are still brisk, most of the new immigrants are from countries outside the area. The reasons for the acceleration of migratory movements in 1990 and 1991 may be sought primarily in the persisting demographic and economic imbalances between North and South and the political changes in Central and Eastern Europe. Any attempt at forecasting in this area is complicated by the variety of routes and channels taken by migrants and the larger geographical catchment area to be considered in analysing international migration.

Along with the natural growth of established foreign or foreign-born populations, the growth and diversity of the new inflows means that immigration is playing an increasing role in total population growth in many OECD countries. Moreover, migrant workers, because of the longstanding presence in these countries, are permeating all sectors of the economy and labour market, although some immigrant categories are more at risk from unemployment than others.

Even if it is impossible to predict at all accurately the magnitude and direction of future migratory flows, obviously there would appear to be very strong demographic, economic and political incentives to emigration in many non-OECD countries. Thus, at the beginning of this decade, OECD countries’ migration policies were essentially three-pronged: to monitor and regulate flows more closely; to step up efforts to combat illegal migration and employment of undeclared labour; and to facilitate the integration of immigrant groups. However, despite the concern to regulate flows better, some OECD countries are nonetheless increasing inflows of new permanent and temporary migrants -- as evidenced by the US Immigration Law -- or, as could happen after the advent of the Single European Market, making it easier for foreign workers living in one Member country to move to others within the same free-trade area.

* SOPEMI: Continuous Reporting System on Migration.
The previous SOPEMI report drew attention to one of the conclusions of the International Conference on Migration held in Rome in March 1991 and sponsored jointly by the Italian authorities and the OECD: namely, that emigration was not the answer to the problems of underdevelopment and that a new form of co-operation between the North and South needed to be established in order to reduce the incentives to emigration in the latter countries. Part I of SOPEMI 1992 concludes by discussing two approaches that underscore the economic links between receiving and sending countries and that could be of help in consolidating the economic development of the countries of the South. The two factors to be taken into consideration are, on the one hand, migratory flows and international trade and, on the other, migrants’ remittances and the balance-of-payments situation of the sending countries. To illustrate the nature of the economic and financial ties between sending and receiving countries, the report examines the relationship between the United States and Mexico, between Germany and two European countries (Turkey and Yugoslavia), and between France and the three Maghreb countries (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia).

Part II of SOPEMI 1992 reviews recent developments in migratory flows and migration policies for each of the countries participating in the continuous reporting system set up within the OECD. It focuses on foreign population movements, including emigration, immigration and flows of asylum-seekers. Another aspect discussed is the foreign or foreign-born labour force. Countries’ migration policies are also closely scrutinised with a view to highlighting recent changes or pointing out any innovative features in any particular OECD country.

Developments in Central and Eastern Europe have intensified East-West migratory flows as well as intra-regional flows. These flows are studied in Part III of SOPEMI 1992, with special reference to Hungary, Poland and the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic (CSFR). Statistics from these three countries underestimate the true number of emigrants, when compared with host country records of arrivals, particularly in the case of Germany.

While the mass East-West exodus some predicted has so far not occurred, Central and Eastern Europe obviously remains a major source of potential migration, fuelled by growing economic, political, social, and ethnic tensions. In the early 1990s one of the salient features of migration in Hungary, Poland and the CSFR is its diversity: emigration takes a variety of forms and channels; immigration between countries in the region is increasing and predominant; another major source is still the developing countries of Asia and Africa.

East-West emigration flows are made up of short-stay migrants (tourists, temporary or seasonal workers). ethnic minorities with roots in a particular Western country, asylum-seekers and migrants coming to settle permanently, most of them in OECD countries. Among the OECD countries Germany remains the main host country for migrants from Central and Eastern Europe (especially for (Aussiedler), ethnic minorities of German descent), followed by Austria. Most immigrants (including persons whose ethnic roots lie in OECD countries) are from the former USSR, Poland, the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, and Hungary.
Migratory movements are also occurring among the central and eastern European countries. Some inhabitants of the former USSR, for instance, are travelling to countries with Western borders -- principally Poland and Hungary -- to find work or sell goods. People of Polish descent from Belarussia and Hungarian minorities from Ukraine also participate in these transborder flows. Romanian applying for refugee status accounted for the bulk of recent applications for asylum in Hungary and Poland. These two countries, as well as the CSFR, are receiving a small inflow of returning migrants who had earlier left the country on political grounds.

The three countries are having to cope with growing numbers of migrants passing through their territories in the hope of settling in Western Europe. For instance, nationals of the developing countries of Asia and Africa, as well as Romanians and Gypsies, attempt to enter Germany and Sweden from Poland and the CSFR. Those arrested are generally sent back to their country of origin or to their last country of transit or abode.

Another salient feature of East-West migration are bilateral labour agreements between countries of the region and several OECD countries (inter alia, Belgium, France, Germany and Switzerland). The future shape of East-West migratory movements will depend above all on the outcome of the economic, social and political reforms in train in the central and eastern European countries. Given the liberalisation of emigration legislation and the resurgence of bitter interethnic conflicts, the incentive to emigrate will in all evidence continue to be strong in the years ahead and could swell the pool of illegal migrants.

The countries concerned nonetheless agree on the need to co-ordinate their efforts to regulate the migratory flows since illegal migration is ill tolerated by the public at large in the host country. The absorptive capacity of the OECD countries for migrants from Central and Eastern Europe is still fairly limited. The freedom to travel afforded by the changes in these countries does not imply freedom to migrate and settle abroad, even though several Member countries no longer require visas for Poles, Hungarians and Czechoslovakiens staying for three months or less. It is thus freedom with surveillance, for Member country public opinion would have great difficulty in accepting a massive influx of migrants from Central and Eastern Europe.

The SOPEMI report, published for the first time in hard-back form, contains 90 tables and 8 graphs on stock and flow data for various categories of migrant populations.

Journalists may obtain a copy of the report from the OECD Press Division, 2 rue André Pascal, 75775 Paris cedex 16 (tel. 45 24 80 88 or 80 89).

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