OECD: TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

The latest annual report "Trends in International Migration" shows that, in most OECD countries, the trend towards an acceleration and globalisation of migratory flows was confirmed in 1991 and 1992. At the same time, though, the old patterns were maintained, while migration’s regional character became more pronounced. Nonetheless, except in Germany, Sweden and the United States, the first months of 1993 seemed to suggest a sharp change, marked by low growth and even a decline in the numbers of new migrants and asylum seekers. This may have been partly due to slower economic growth and persisting unemployment, but measures by several OECD countries to control flows more effectively may also have been a factor. However, it is probably too soon to speak of a definite reversal of trend, since past experience shows that it is impossible to predict the scale or direction of future migrant flows. The turnaround may be no more than a cyclical shift.

For the first time, the report outlines recent migration trends in selected Asian countries, in order to shed light on Japan’s current situation. For the moment, Japan is not experiencing large-scale flows. But inward flows have been rising in recent years, and Japan has been reporting arrivals of migrants of Japanese descent, mainly from Brazil and Peru. Illegal immigration is also growing.

The Continuous Reporting System on Migration (SOPEMI) has also extended its coverage of developments in Central and Eastern Europe, which in the previous report covered Hungary, Poland and the Czech and Slovak Federal Republics. Two new countries, Bulgaria and Romania, joined the network of correspondents in 1992. The information on these countries makes clearer the impact of recent political and economic change on East-West migration and population movements within the region.

The report notes that nearly all OECD countries are now concerned about the recent trends in migratory flows, though they are not all in the same situation. Southern European countries are attempting to manage new waves of immigration after taking steps to regularise the situation of undocumented aliens. The number of applications for asylum remains high in several countries, but the number in Germany in 1992 was exceptionally high, exceeding the total number of applications in all other European OECD countries that year.
The great East-West exodus feared by some has not so far occurred, but the crisis in the former Yugoslavia has caused large unforeseen population movements. Central and Eastern Europe and the former USSR remain a major source of potential migration, fuelled by economic and political change and social and ethnic tensions. East-West migration is at present of primary concern to Germany, with smaller flows to Austria and Sweden, while most arrivals from North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa are in France, Italy and Spain. Migrants from Asia account for a considerable share of new arrivals in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and the United States. Ethnic minority migration is, on the whole, affecting only a few OECD countries -- Germany, Turkey, Greece, Finland and Japan. However, this type of migration seems to pose a far more serious challenge to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former USSR. Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and Austria have been particularly affected by arrivals of displaced persons and refugees from former Yugoslavia.

Various measures were taken in 1992 and 1993 to control flows more effectively, to make migration policies more credible and to improve policies that aim to facilitate the integration of migrants in host countries. The SOPEMI report mentions some of these measures, such as the allocation of additional resources to the services responsible for frontier controls and managing migration, the extension of visa procedures to more countries, the tightening up of controls on illegal immigration and on the employment of undocumented foreigners, and the redefinition of the selection criteria for immigrants to meet specific labour market needs.

In addition to the need to control flows, the other main objective of migration policies remains the integration of immigrants into OECD countries. The report underlines the fact that in almost all countries the total foreign or immigrant population is a permanent feature of the labour market.

Recent measures taken in several OECD countries to facilitate the integration of immigrants are wide-ranging. Some countries put the emphasis on learning the host country language, others on schooling for migrants’ children, insertion into the labour market or on improving living conditions in areas with large immigrant communities.

Drawing on the conclusions of the Conference on Migration and International Co-operation held in Madrid on 29-31 March 1993 on the initiative of Canada, Spain and the OECD, the report notes that the control of flows is only a partial response to the acceleration and diversification of migratory movements. Only economic development and the promotion of employment can help in the long or medium-term to reduce incentives to emigrate.

Part II of the report consists of country notes which describe recent flow developments and migration policies in the countries reviewed.

Part III deals with migration movements in Central and Eastern Europe. It is preceded by an overview of the economic and employment situation, the prospects for emigration and the development of immigration. Each country is then reviewed separately. For Bulgaria and Romania, the analysis of recent migration trends is preceded by a brief historical survey.
Part IV presents the findings of an OECD Secretariat study of the macroeconomic impact of migration.

The SOPEMI report contains 131 tables and 13 charts containing time series of total and active populations for immigrants or foreigners, and migration flows into OECD countries.

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