

Graduating as a Migrant? Professional and labour mobility since 1989

With the accession of Central and Eastern European countries to the EU, the flows and perceptions of labour mobility and migration have changed noticeably. One need only think of access restrictions to Western European labour markets in the context of simultaneously desired and feared immigration from Eastern Europe. Arguably, this story goes back to 1989 and is embedded in the wider European trends of encouraged mobility. Is a new and mobile generation of Europeans emerging? Does education and labour migration across Europe, possibly repeated, signal a coming together of Eastern and Western Europe?

This working group is collaborating initially in a book project, to be completed in late 2008. Further research, conference and publishing activities are envisaged from 2009 onwards.

Migration policies and the internationalisation of higher education are an indelible part of the context. Indeed, education and professional migrants are changing the face of intra-European migration. The number of Eastern European graduates in Western Europe is rising fast. While in a 'national container' perspective education migrants are objectified (e.g. as cash cow for the higher education industry, as returnee development agent in the name of modernization or as gap filler in the receiving country), this working group aims at establishing a trans-national perspective on the lives, flows and perceptions of the so called highly skilled migrants since 1989.

It is often assumed that emigration, especially of the highly skilled, reduces productivity, while it is also proposed that immigration might resolve skills shortages. Receiving western European countries typically, however, are not willing to fully integrate migrants. Indeed, some western European countries continue to purposefully deny freedom of movement inside the European Union. Nevertheless, millions have migrated and among these there are an increasing number of highly skilled. The European Higher Education Area reinforces this trend, as does legislation aimed at enticing 'foreign' graduates to stay. Does this large-scale migration reinforce structural integration across Europe?

Or does this new migration lead to a re-affirmation of difference in identity and outlook? East-West migration is one of the most controversial European topics. We propose to investigate the perception of migrants as manifest in discursive shifts. Before 1989 migrants from the East were received mostly sympathetically as political refugees in the West - although economic motives were often present too. Conversely, in much of central and eastern Europe idealised perceptions about life in the West existed. Since 1989 perceptions about migration to the West have shifted – both in sending and receiving countries.

In understanding 1989 as a global event, the working group strives to include perspectives from Asia, Australia and the Americas. The flows and perceptions of migrants have also changed significantly since 1989, e.g. with Indian students migrating to Australia or Chinese students going abroad in large numbers.

To stimulate debate, we point to the following issues:

The historical specificity of the current cohort of trans-national education migrants - in contrast to earlier forms of mobility such as exile (e.g. from totalitarian regimes)

and exchange programmes (e.g. to bridge the gulf between former war combatants);

The flow of education migrants in Europe in relation to global flows of highly-skilled migrants and its significance for specific European labour markets (e.g. research, engineers, health, management, law and so on);

The position of education migrants in relation to European efforts to open labour markets and persistent national resistance by way of legal and informal discrimination (denial of freedom of movement in the EU, visa regime, ethnic stratification, but also efforts to retain graduates in-country);

The significance and meaning of post-1989 education migration and the emergence of trans-national EastWest networks as new forms of 'living together' in Europe and as a faction of the emergent Generation Global that lives in trans-national spaces.

We also raise the following questions:

What might be gained by comparing public discourse on the (earlier) South-North migration with (later) East-West migration? Can we say something about similarities and differences?

In how far is public discourse interrelated or disconnected if we were to observe the intersection of discourses, for example on skills shortage and labour markets, education and welfare, or freedom of movement and crime?

What is the variance in public discourse in the sending countries? Does it vary systematically with membership or non-membership in the European Union? Are earlier historical divisions of relevance?

At the European level: What can we say about the intersection of political, legal and economic discourse?

Is the ethnic migration of millions to Germany (from Eastern Europe) just a special case or does it have a broader significance for Europe?

After 2004, particularly Britain and Ireland have received migrants in large numbers, but recently more EU countries have liberalised their labour markets: What has been the public discourse on the issue?

The long-term consequences of 1989 for Europe are still emerging and are, as yet, not very well understood beyond the regional trajectories of the former Eastern Europe. Our conjecture is that the transformative period from 1989 to 2004 has resulted in increasing levels of institutional integration across the wider Europe (i.e. Council of Europe, European Higher Education Area, European Union), but has also led to ideational divergence along regional lines that seems to spring from the divided Europe as it existed in the early 1980s. We surmise that while intra-European migration, especially education migration and mobility of the highly skilled, has fostered structural integration, the public discourses on the topic point to ideational divergence. What would be evidence to support or refute this conjecture?

Particularly welcome at this stage would be further contributions, which are

Comparative and relatively broad, giving an overview of flows and/or perceptions across Europe, review sending or receiving countries, or discuss the issue at the European level;

About the lives of the professionally mobile and graduating migrants (life histories, interviews, ethnography etc.);

Discuss new significant professional migration outside Europe (e.g. Chinese or Indians to Australia) and to Europe (e.g. global reach of EU schemes).

Current members of the Working Group: Michiel Baas, Cristina Bradatan, Marcin Galent, Idesbald Goddeeris, D'Artis Kancs, Julda Kielyte, Laszlo Kulcsar, Mihaela Nedelcu, Dariusz Niedzwiedzki, Magdalena Nowicka, Adel Pasztor, Raluca Prelipceanu, Volha Vysotskaya, Nina Wolfeil, Chris Armbruster