

1. Introduction

This is the 14th annual report for the Council of Europe describing the main current trends in international migration in Europe. By virtue of their regularity and continuity over the last decade the reports provide an account of how European international migration has evolved since the great political changes of 1989-91.

At their Luxembourg meeting in 1991 the Council of Europe ministers responsible for migration issues were confronted with a new and largely uncharted situation. Suddenly, it seemed, there was likely to be mass migration from the East, towards the lotus lands of western Europe. Growing flows from the countries of the South were creating a new "migration frontier" along the northern shores of the Mediterranean. Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal, traditionally countries of emigration, faced the fact that they were now ones of net immigration. A new asylum regime came into being as the problems stemming from the break-up of Yugoslavia led to widespread use of temporary protection. In central and eastern Europe, ethnically-based migrations were common, frequently continuations of those that had begun in the aftermath of the Second World War but had ceased with the descent of the Iron Curtain. Other ethnic moves were of conationals "returning" to a motherland; some were of populations displaced in communist times. New economic flows developed, between East and West and within central and eastern Europe. Some were permanent, many were short-term and a new lexicon grew up to describe them – labour tourism, "pendular" migration, petty trading and transit migration.

The increasing incorporation of central and eastern Europe into the European migration system as a whole characterised the middle and late 1990s. In political terms attention turned more and more to the management of migration. By the middle 1990s it was possible to say that Europe had largely adapted to a changed migration regime although there was great uncertainty as to how to handle the fall-out from the Yugoslavian crisis. Elements of the picture were still blurred, especially in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union where data systems remained inadequate. Furthermore, the growing significance of illegal migration, human smuggling and migrant trafficking were already causing concern. As the formerly separate western and eastern

European migration systems fused into one, some eastern countries had also become ones of immigration.

Today, the burning issues are no longer those of ten years earlier. Recorded migration is now relatively stable, with the exception of the incorporation of large numbers of amnestied former illegal migrants in some countries. Western European countries are growing more concerned with the challenges of their ageing demographics and the role that international migration might be called upon to play. There is also a realisation that the demography of immigrants is an important element in future population developments in Europe (Haug, Compton and Courbage, 2002). The response to some skill shortages at home is increasing openness to those from abroad and there is some evidence of global competition for highly qualified people. Unrecorded and irregular migrations continue to pose challenges, but there is no hard evidence that their scale is increasing. Indeed, some data suggest the numbers might be declining, although this may reflect the diversion of irregular flows into new and less policed routes.

What does seem to be emerging is a more integrated European economic space, characterised by both new and older forms of mobility. There is now widespread circulation of people in informal and short-term movements, but there are also some remarkable parallels with the guest worker phase in the decades after the Second World War.

In the medium term the biggest issue will be the effects of the new round of European Union (EU) enlargement, bringing ten countries and 75 million people into the Union. Past experience and several studies of the prospective enlargement have failed to indicate that further large scale movements from the new to the existing member states will occur, although there is bound to be some redistribution of population as the economies of the Union become more integrated. What may confidently be anticipated is that the attraction of the European theatre as a whole will increase.