



INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

REGIONAL FACT SHEET

Western Europe

Wide-ranging policy adaptations have been taking shape in Western European countries, which collectively surpass all other regions with 64 million migrants within their borders in 2005. The region also stands second only to North America in their overall 15-million increase in migrant stock between 1990 and 2005. New migrants to Western Europe today are more likely to hail from African, Latin American and Asian countries, and are being supplemented by workers from new European Union member states, or from adjoining countries such as the Ukraine or the Russian Federation. *See profile on Eastern Europe/Russia.*

Most countries in the region state a preference to maintain current levels of immigration and to increase the influx of skilled workers, despite anxiety about the impact of immigration on cultural identities and jobs and concern about illegal border crossings and links between immigrant communities and actual or alleged terrorist plots. Luxembourg, Germany, Spain and Italy recently have taken steps to relax laws on naturalization.

In 2004, only the United Kingdom, Ireland and Sweden decided to extend the right of freedom of movement to workers from the 10 new EU member States, and since then Spain, Italy, Portugal and Finland have lifted restrictions, and France has stated an intention to do so gradually, according to reporting by the Financial Times.

The need to allow a certain volume of immigration is borne of the demographic imperative facing the region. Birth rates are declining and the population is graying—more than 20 per cent of Western Europeans are over 60 years old, a higher ratio than in any other region, according to UN Population Division statistics. The “potential support ratio”—the number of working age individuals available to support those who are 65 or older—has sunk to 4:1. Under current trends, this ratio is headed to 2:1 by 2050.

Europe’s population in fact would have shrunk by 4.4 million (-1.2 per cent) from 1995 to 2000, if not for the arrival of about 5 million migrants during that period, according to the UN. Germany’s population would have been declining as of 1970 if not for incoming migration and, in the late 1990s, immigration contributed at least three-quarters of the population growth in Austria, Denmark, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain and Switzerland.

Immigration is not a panacea for difficulties associated with population ageing and low fertility—the UN projects that France, for instance, will take in 3.75 million migrants from 2000 to 2050, but would need to bring in the impossibly high number of nearly 90 million over that period if it aimed to maintain 1995 support ratios.

Immigration nevertheless tends to significantly help to maintain the viability of social pension systems, to provide workers to fill jobs that are unpopular or where there are sectoral shortages, and to stimulate economic growth. The French Institute of International Relations, for instance, predicts decreasing economic growth on the continent in coming decades unless substantial migration inflows continue. And an August 2006 study by the Autonomous

University of Barcelona and the Catalan state savings bank assessed that Spanish per capita output would have declined over the past ten years, rather than growing by an actual annual rate of 2.6 per cent, if not for the arrival of migrants during that period.

European countries are taking steps to address a major impediment to prospects of migrant communities—poor academic performance of the second generation, which translates into a higher probability of unemployment and welfare dependency among migrant than among non-migrants. In the EU overall, unemployment levels among foreigners are almost twice as high as those among EU citizens. To improve the labour-market performance of migrants, several receiving countries have language and vocational training programmes, often focusing on migrant women, who tend to have greater limitations in finding jobs. In addition, countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden offer incentives to employers hiring the long-term unemployed, to the benefit of many migrants.

Perilous waters

From a broader perspective, the multicultural approach to assimilation of migrants—which in the 1970s replaced the “melting pot” concept—has been under critical review. The last few years have seen a resurgence of efforts to integrate migrants into national cultures. In an August 2006 policy address, the British Secretary of Communities hailed the diversity and rich experience that multiculturalism has brought to the UK, but said that the Government would investigate failures in the integration of immigrant communities.

Another area of concern and public alarm is the increasing pace of attempts by mostly young Africans to breach EU borders via sea routes, and the alarming number of deaths associated with these desperate ventures. Policy responses were developed at a 2006 conference between EU and African Union countries in Rabat, Morocco. *See profile on Sub-Saharan Africa.* □

Table 1: Estimated average annual numbers of migrants to selected Western European countries

Receiving country	Average annual number of migrants (thousands)		
	1990–1994	1995–1999	2000–2004
Migrant inflows			
France	120	128	191
Spain	33	66	483
Net migration			
Belgium ^a	27	24	35
Denmark ^b	10	15	10
Finland	8	3	5
Italy	60	115	..
Netherlands	54	49	48
Norway ^a	8	11	12
Sweden	32	10	28
United Kingdom ^a	22	82	101
Net migration by citizenship			
Germany	646	201	177
Foreigners	364	84	117
Citizens	282	117	60

Source: Calculated from the Population Division of the United Nations Secretariat, *International Migration Flows to and from Selected Countries: 2005 Revision (POP/DB/MIG/FL/Rev.2005)*, database in digital form.

Note: Two dots (..) signify data unavailable.

^a Data for the most recent period referring to 2000–2003.

^b Data for the most recent period referring to 2000–2002.