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European Migration: What Do We Know?

A Review Article

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European Migration: What Do We Know? Edited by KLAUS F. ZIMMERMANN. Oxford University Press, Oxford. 2005. 653 pp., £65.

As a composite entity, (most of) today's Europe constitutes a unique social science experiment in general, and an intriguing migration laboratory in particular. The history of Europe's nation-states is replete with actions, ranging from costly peaceful endeavours to costlier savage wars, to define and defend borders. Perhaps more boundary-blood has been shed in Europe in the protection of demarcation lines, the consolidation of borders, and the pushing out of frontiers than in the pursuit, or in defence, of any other cause. Where it took place, migration between European nation-states took the form of an expedition, if not an incursion. In the course of the past fifty years, Europe has moved in a direction diametrically opposed to the continent's historical legacy. Between 1870 and 1945, Germany and France fought each other three times; a mere decade later (on signing the Treaty of Rome in 1957) they busily tore down the border between them. This reversal of the historical trend was followed by the successive dismantling of borders between 25 (and from 2007, 27) states. Migration between European nation-states is now merely an excursion, if not a walk.

How did this amazing crumbling of barriers modify, energize, reshape, and induce migratory flows between European countries? How did the migration calculus of individuals and households change in response to the evolving reality? How were migration policies and policies that impinge on migration (instruments still in the hands of individual European countries) designed and reformulated as a consequence? In anticipation? What type of *European* (or European Union) policies are emerging? How far have these procedures succeeded or failed? Surprisingly, answers to these questions are hard to find in the compilation under review.

Consider a pattern change. When (costly) barriers to migration come down, a sequence of temporary migratory moves may replace a continuous single move. Such a

sequence would confer high returns to work where wages, prices, and the cost of living are high (say in Germany), and a disposition of the earnings where the cost of living is low (say in Poland), and it would allow a reduction in the costs to migrants of separation from their families, as well as of the migrants' families from their member migrants. This topic is nowhere addressed in the compilation.

What interesting themes run through the chapters? All the chapters allude to the issue of assimilation, or address the topic of illegal migration, or refer to both.

Consider assimilation. A common culture and common language facilitate communication and interaction between individuals. Consequently, the assimilation of migrants into the mainstream culture of their host country is likely to increase their productivity and earnings. Quite often, however, migrants appear to exert little effort to absorb the mainstream culture and language, even though the economic returns to assimilation are high. The contributors to this compilation express concern about this and explore possible means of transforming migrants into 'ethnics' and 'nationals'. However, the proposed policies do not allow for the fact that migrants could optimally elect *not* to assimilate. When interpersonal comparisons affect individuals' wellbeing, and when a more intensive assimilation results in migrants' comparing themselves more with the richer natives and less with their fellow migrants, then the effort extended to assimilate will be muted. The more effort a migrant exerts to assimilate into the mainstream culture, the closer he will be in social space to the natives and the farther away he will be in social space from his fellow migrants. Think of a model that positively incorporates, in the migrant's utility function, the migrant's income (as an increasing function of the migrant's effort to assimilate), negatively incorporates the effort itself, *and* negatively incorporates the discontent arising from the higher incomes of others, where these 'others' are both fellow migrants and the much better-off natives. The weights accorded to each of these two groups are functions of the effort to assimilate. It is possible then to derive the optimal level of assimilation effort as a solution to the utility maximization problem, and to show that this optimal level is *lower* than it would have been had the effect of interpersonal comparisons not been incorporated in the migrant's utility function. Owing to the endogenous formation of reference groups and interpersonal comparisons, migrants may have a weak incentive to accumulate the skills that would enhance their productivity.

Consider illegal migration. Illegal migrants supply a valuable productive input: effort. But their status as illegals means that they face a strictly positive probability of expulsion. A return to their country of origin results in reduced earnings for them when the wage at origin is lower than the wage at destination. This prospect induces illegal migrants to exert more effort than comparable workers who face no such prospect. The lower the probable alternative home-country earnings, the harsher the penalty for illegal migrants on their return—for a *given* probability of expulsion—and the higher the level of effort they will exert at destination. While the home-country wage that awaits the illegal migrants upon their return is exogenous to the host country, the *probability* of their return is not. Given the home-country wage, a higher probability of expulsion will induce illegal migrants to apply more effort. Hence, different combinations of probabilities of expulsion and home-country wages yield the same level of effort. Thus, variation in the extent to which receiving countries undertake measures aimed at apprehending and expelling illegal migrants can be attributed not to characteristics of the illegal migrants themselves, but to a feature pertaining to the illegal migrants' countries of origin. Evidence suggests that countries differ in the extent to which they are lenient or harsh towards the illegal migrants in their midst, and particular countries appear to treat such migrants differently at different times. Most of the countries of southern Europe, whose illegal migrants come largely from North Africa where wages are very low, have been much more lenient than the countries of northern Europe, whose illegal migrants have often come from southern Europe where wages are not so low. Illegal migrants in Israel have lately been treated very harshly—a special government authority was set up to interdict and expel illegal migrants—a policy shift that closely follows a shift in illegal migrants away from workers coming largely from the administered territories where wages are very low, to workers who increasingly

originate from eastern Europe where wages are not that low. While there could be cultural, sociological, or political reasons for this diversity, there may be, as I have just suggested, an economic explanation for the apparent variation in the degree of tolerance accorded to illegal migrants.

There is no attempt in the compilation to engage in a through analysis or a testing of these or similar lines of thought pertaining to either assimilation or illegal migration.

Setting aside the said omissions, the compilation is marred by another oddity: in a book entitled *European Migration*, the descriptive accounts of migration in 11 European countries are complemented by chapters covering four non-European countries: the USA, Israel, Canada, and New Zealand. The US chapter takes no account whatsoever of Europe; the chapter on Israel does not reveal how the extensive Israeli experience in 'processing' migrants can be applied to the European scene; and the concluding paragraphs that the authors of the chapters on Canada and New Zealand appear to have been persuaded to add, on the relevance of the experience of their countries to the European migration policy menu, are quite inadequate. There is not a shred of an attempt to analyse why and how, and with what modifications and adjustments, if any, a given procedure that worked in one country (Canada) but not in another (New Zealand) could, or could not, be applicable to Europe. Worse still, the chapter that reviews the Canadian experience concludes: 'What lessons does the Canadian immigrant labor market experience yield for Europe? ... Canada does have one overriding lesson to offer—economically screen at least one-half of an immigrant cohort for human capital characteristics and you minimize short-run labor market impacts' (p. 598). Really? If a physician were similarly to adhere blindingly to a fixed procedure in treating his heterogeneous population of patients, morbidity rates, if not mortality rates, would surely register a rise. If the reader ponders for too long what to make of the 'Canadian prescription', the next piece of advice will hit him just as hard: 'The New Zealand experience suggests that a controlled immigration policy with an emphasis on highly-skilled immigrants does not by itself guarantee a successful integration of immigrants' (p. 629). One advantage of the conflicting prescriptions is that we can safely choose not to accept any of them.

Whereas Europe has feverishly dismantled boundaries, the compilation has not. The scientific demarcation lines between chapters are as rigid as concrete walls and barbed wire. For example, the authors of the chapters on migration in the UK and Ireland do not refer to each other's chapter at all, as if the significance of migration from Ireland to the UK and of return migration from the UK to Ireland matters to Ireland but not to the UK. And, given that for nearly twenty years the bulk of migration from Greece was to Germany, how come there is no reference in the chapter on German migration to the (interesting and comprehensive) chapter on Greek migration, or vice versa? The mind boggles.

All in all, the chapters in the compilation reveal little that is new, offer no fresh analytical insights, and fall short of delineating path-breaking empirical regularities. Does the Introduction compensate? Does it thematically integrate and intellectually challenge? 'Europe has no position in the international labour market for highly skilled people' (p. 1). 'The European Union countries now need to ensure that the mobile highly skilled Eastern Europeans are not attracted only to traditional immigration countries' (p. 2). If the former holds, how can the latter be achieved? 'Surprisingly ... immigration is largely beneficial for the receiving countries' (p. 3). Surprising? New? 'The concept of the book is to *compare* the empirical findings on migration in major European countries after the Second World War *in a unified framework*' (p. 6; emphasis added). Which 'unifying framework?' There is none whatsoever across the chapters. And where are the comparisons? There are none. (I have already noted that there are not even cross-references between the constituent chapters.) 'The book summarizes for the first time the existing evidence in Europe and contrasts it with the experiences of ... [the] traditional immigration countries' (p. 12). No, it does not. Nearly all the chapter authors draw on their own past reviews and surveys, there are hardly any new offerings, and nothing contrasts with anything. All we have is odd introductory remarks and disjointed depictions of migration in a number of

European countries which do not translate into a composite panorama of European migration.

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