



Resolution 1501 (2006)¹

Working migration from the countries of Eastern and Central Europe : present state and perspectives

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Migrants today represent 2.9% of the world population. The United Nations Population Division estimates the migrant population in 2005 to be around 185 to 192 million people, compared to 175 million in 2000, and 82 million in 1970. This rise in international migration is inevitably linked to the effects of globalised economies on international labour mobility.
2. For more than two centuries most countries in western Europe have been countries of emigration. The only exceptions were France and Switzerland, both of which already started recruiting foreign labour in the 19th century. Over the last sixty years, the remaining countries in western Europe, and more recently in southern Europe, gradually became destination countries for international migrants. Several of the new European Union (EU) member states in central Europe now also follow that pattern.
3. In western Europe there were about 10 million registered foreign workers in 2002, representing an increase of 38% compared to the figure in 1995 of about 7.3 million. This increase is in part due to the entry of new foreign workers into countries such as Ireland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The overall increase is, however, largely due to the regularisation of irregular workers in Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece. Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom host between them almost two thirds of the total foreign labour force in western Europe.
4. Contrary to the public debate and fears of massive immigration flows to western Europe, East-West migration turned out to be relatively modest, representing less than 1% of the labour force. Germany, Austria and to some extent Italy, Spain and Portugal attract most migrant workers from central and eastern Europe. The majority of migrants are young, between 18 and 44 years of age, working mainly in agriculture, construction, transport, the hospitality industry, catering, and in the household service sector. Their stay is less permanent, may involve circular migration or regular returns to their home country, and varies in nature.
5. While the economic situation and labour markets differ across Europe, a number of countries display a dichotomy between relatively high unemployment, particularly for long-term unemployed, and short-term work shortage. The reasons are manifold and are in part due to the fact that work cannot be found for many unemployed people owing to their lack of qualifications or their limited occupational or spatial mobility, or else because the work available is unattractive.
6. The examples of the United Kingdom and Ireland, which opened their labour markets to nationals from new EU member states, show that migrants from central and eastern Europe can indeed help to fill the gaps in labour markets, contributing to the success of the economy, whilst making very few demands on the welfare system.
7. As the host countries in western Europe will increasingly benefit from a young, dynamic and skilled work force, countries of origin, particularly non-EU countries, are faced with serious effects of youth and brain drain. Current, rather complex, migratory movements across central and eastern Europe – involving emigration, immigration and irregular transit – are consequent to the enlargement of the European Union

1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 29 May 2006 (see [Doc. 10842](#), report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population, rapporteur: Mrs Jelena Hoffmann).



eastwards and to the sustained economic growth in a number of countries which in turn attract foreign labour and irregular migration from further east (Ukraine, Russian Federation, Belarus, Moldova), South-Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa.

8. Employers' efforts to cut labour costs and the willingness of migrant workers' to take on more precarious and less well-paid jobs may seriously erode the acquired labour standards in Europe and, more generally, worldwide. Employment of undocumented workers, without set wages, regulated working conditions or social security payments, not only undermines the principle of fair competition but also creates conditions for modern slavery.

9. The Parliamentary Assembly insists on the strict implementation of international labour standards and on the respect of equal rights for migrant workers, in addition to applying effective and persuasive sanctions for employers who resort to recruitment of undocumented workers.

10. Europe needs more structured policies to prevent irregular immigration in co-operation with countries of origin and transit. Such policies go hand in hand with better and more transparent management of regular migration. Countries in central and eastern Europe are particularly in need of guidance towards better migration management.

11. In the light of the above, the Assembly recommends to the member states:

11.1. with regard to orderly labour migration management:

11.1.1. to harmonise data collection on the volume and nature of migratory flows, so as to improve the comparative overview of migratory flows in Europe and to allow for a better insight into their changing nature;

11.1.2. to develop proactive migration policies in line with the guiding principles of the migration management strategy, adopted by the European Committee on Migration (CDMG);

11.1.3. to link immigration policies with labour market needs through a regular dialogue with social partners;

11.1.4. to develop managed migration for employment purposes, including bilateral and multilateral agreements between host countries and countries of origin, in compliance with international labour standards;

11.1.5. to recognise and accredit migrant workers' skills and qualifications, as appropriate, in order to improve their chances of employment;

11.1.6. to promote guidelines for ethical recruitment;

11.2. with regard to prevention of irregular labour migration:

11.2.1. to raise awareness in the countries of origin on the conditions of entry to the respective host countries;

11.2.2. to establish recruitment and training centres in the countries of origin for specific skills which are needed in the labour markets of the host countries, in order to make sure that people do not migrate without a good prospect for a job;

11.2.3. to harmonise visa arrangements so as to prevent discrepancies if a change of status occurs (for tourism, employment or education purposes);

11.2.4. to apply effective sanctions to employers who employ undocumented migrant workers;

11.3. with regard to the protection of migrant workers' rights:

11.3.1. to sign, ratify and implement the European Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers (ETS No. 93);

11.3.2. to sign, ratify and implement the relevant provisions of the revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163), concerning the rights of migrant workers and their families;

11.3.3. to implement the International Labour Organization's (ILO) plan of action for migrant workers in a global economy;

11.3.4. to license and supervise recruitment and contracting agencies for migrant workers in accordance with ILO Convention No. 181 and [Recommendation No. 188](#);

- 11.3.5. to improve labour inspection and to establish ways for migrant workers to lodge complaints and seek remedy without intimidation;
- 11.3.6. to promote decent work for migrant workers and raise awareness of migrant workers' rights;
- 11.4. with regard to co-operation between host countries and countries of origin:
 - 11.4.1. to improve the conditions for direct foreign investment in countries of central and eastern Europe;
 - 11.4.2. in co-operation with social partners, to develop European traineeship exchange programmes for young people to enhance their skills and possibilities for employment;
 - 11.4.3. to develop policies to encourage return migration, reintegration into the country of origin and transfer of capital and technology by migrants;
 - 11.4.4. to facilitate the transfer of social security entitlements through bilateral, regional or multilateral agreements.