



Resolution 1718 (2010)¹

Final version

The impact of the global economic crisis on migration in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The current financial and economic downturn and the rapid rise in unemployment have particularly severe consequences for international migrants and remittance receivers.
2. The depth, extent and consequences of the crisis vary across the world as some regions are better protected from the global downturn than others. The developed countries, including most of the Council of Europe member states, are among those hardest hit by the crisis, accounting for more than two thirds of the increase in the global number of unemployed in 2009, despite accounting for only 30% of the global labour force.
3. With unemployment soaring in Europe, migrant workers are among the first to lose their jobs because of their concentration in those sectors affected the most, such as construction, manufacturing, wholesale and hospitality, and because many have contingent work contracts, limited educational credentials and poor local language skills. In many Council of Europe member states, unemployment among migrants is more than double that of the local population. The situation and protection of migrants should therefore be at the heart of strategies aimed at alleviating the consequences of the current crisis.
4. The overall impact of the economic crisis in terms of migration flows between source and destination countries is still uncertain and very difficult to measure because of a lack of sound data and due to a time lag as the crisis shapes migratory flows. What is observed today is that labour as well as irregular migration inflows to Europe have generally diminished, that the growth rate of remittances has dropped, and that migrants do not return en masse to their countries of origin unless they have the assurance of being able to return once the economic situation improves.
5. The Parliamentary Assembly is particularly concerned about joblessness forcing an ever-increasing number of regular migrants into an irregular situation, which in turn risks leading to a “normalisation of irregularity” everywhere in Europe. Migrants, especially irregular migrants and regular migrants who lose their legal status, are forced to accept the lowest of wages and most difficult working conditions out of fear of unemployment and destitution. This makes them easy prey for smuggling and trafficking networks.
6. The Assembly is equally concerned about the increasing tendency among member states to tighten immigration regulations by introducing admission restrictions or tougher visa and admissions requirements, such as minimum salary requirements or for spouses and dependents to obtain their own visas. There is also a risk that states turn towards protectionism of native workers. The Assembly recalls that migrants may be a positive force in alleviating various aspects of the economic crisis, and that trying to combat the crisis by simply cutting immigration may reduce the ability to fill jobs in sectors in need of manpower, lead to further irregular migration and may prolong the crisis.

1. *Assembly debate* on 27 April 2010 (13th Sitting) (see [Doc. 12200](#), report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population, rapporteur: Mr Agramunt Font de Mora; and [Doc. 12217](#), opinion of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Lindblad). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 27 April 2010 (13th Sitting). See also [Recommendation 1910 \(2010\)](#).



7. Moreover, the revision of immigration policies may result in fewer rights and less social protection for migrants. The Assembly recalls that human-rights-based regulations and policies, which promote access by migrants to decent work, health care, education and adequate housing, are important not only for the protection of the human rights of migrants but also for their social inclusion and integration.

8. The growing vulnerability of migrants to stigmatisation and to increasing xenophobia and discriminatory practices against migrant workers are further human rights concerns generated by growing unemployment, and are also obstacles to the inclusion, acceptance and integration of migrants in host countries.

9. The Assembly recalls that migrant workers participate in the economic growth and prosperity and the creation of wealth in countries of destination, while contributing to reducing poverty in their countries of origin. It is therefore important to adopt appropriate political measures to maximise their contributions to both countries of origin and destination.

10. The Assembly recognises that not all short-term needs for international recruitment will vanish with the economic slowdown and that long-term challenges created by an ageing population and growth in service employment remain important, even beyond any temporary setbacks. Policy responses with respect to labour migration will therefore have to strike a balance between adapting labour inflows to changing labour demand, keeping longer-term objectives in mind during the crisis in order to be ready to benefit from migrants' skills when the economy recovers, and avoiding a backlash against migration in the public opinion.

11. In the light of the above, the Assembly calls upon its member states, the European Union and the world community at large to analyse the multi-dimensional and interconnected elements of the crisis and to take greater consideration of the impact of the crisis on migration and development in Europe and abroad. In particular, they are called upon to:

11.1. keep open the channels of regular migration with a view to meeting any continuing demand for migrant workers, thus helping to prevent irregular migration and trafficking in human beings. In particular, maintain intakes of foreign workers in sectors where labour skills remain necessary and will be required during recovery;

11.2. enable migrant workers who have lost their jobs to retain their immigration status and residence permit for at least a certain period of time after their employment contract ends in order to be able to seek new employment. They should receive the same help in finding a new job as the local population;

11.3. work out functional, comprehensive and long-term migration management policies with a view to maximising the benefits of migration; it is essential that integration policies and programmes continue to be developed and are not negatively impacted by a decrease in funds;

11.4. provide guarantees that the rights of migrants are adequately and effectively protected in terms of their human rights, working and living conditions and in the event of loss of employment;

11.5. strengthen co-operation in the fight against irregular migration, human trafficking and illegal employment of foreigners, while strictly respecting the human rights provided for in instruments of international human rights law. Avoid criminalising irregular migrants and ensure that they are guaranteed at least minimum rights to protect their dignity and prevent them from falling prey to networks of organised crime. On the other hand, avoid mass regularisation in order to fight irregular migration;

11.6. promote measures to facilitate remittances through tax deductible incentives for remittances in both countries and for money placed in special savings accounts to support development projects in the migrant's home country;

11.7. offer adequate protection to migrants through appropriate legal and administrative means to combat racist violence and xenophobia, considering in particular their vulnerability to stigmatisation, and prosecute perpetrators of violent acts to the full extent of the law;

11.8. raise awareness, in particular through the public media, about the important economic and social contributions made by migrants, and encourage the media to portray migrants in objective terms, recognising their positive contributions to society;

11.9. work with civil society groups, and notably with diaspora associations, with a view to challenging the stigmatisation of migrant workers and improving the effectiveness of integration policies;

11.10. in cases where migrant return programmes are initiated by governments, ensure that migrants are treated with dignity and given proper reintegration assistance upon their return. Ensure that re-entry restrictions into the host country are kept to a minimum as these act as disincentives to persons who might otherwise wish to return to their home country. Work with the countries of origin towards transforming the potential of these returned migrants into a “brain gain”;

11.11. encourage national human rights commissions and ombudsmen to monitor the situation of migrants during the economic crisis and react as necessary.

12. The Assembly calls upon its partner organisations – the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and others – to continue to co-operate in disaggregated data collection, and to monitor the various implications and consequences of the economic downturn on migrants and their children.