

The Effects of Migration: Deconstructing Common Misconceptions

انعكاسات ظاهرة الهجرة: محاولة لكسر الأفكار الخاطئة

Dr BENTEBIBEL Doria Yasmina*
University of Algiers 3 - Algeria
bentebibel.doriayasmina@univ-alger3.dz

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Abstract:

Few political and social issues generate as much passion and controversy as immigration. States adopt different migration policies which are characterised, particularly in developed countries, by a restrictive nature. Migrants are often viewed as a menace to territorial sovereignty and national security, as a challenge to the State's economy and to the cultural composition of the nation. This security paranoia, serving political and electoral purposes, is often based on received ideas aimed at justifying the adoption of drastic migration policies. A more objective look at the migration phenomenon will however demonstrate the unfoundedness of these arguments, and will prove, on the contrary, that emigration, when rationally managed, has clearly positive effects both on host countries and those of origin.

Key words: Migration, benefits, disadvantages, stereotypes, demystification,

المخلص:

تعتبر مسألة الهجرة من أكثر القضايا السياسية والاجتماعية التي تثير الجدل والاختلاف في أوساط المجتمع الدولي. تتباين سياسات الهجرة التي تتبناها الدول، وغالبا ما تأخذ طابعا تعسفيا في بلدان الشمال، أين يُنظر إلى المهاجرين على أنهم تهديد للسيادة الإقليمية والأمن القومي، وخطر على اقتصاد الدول وهويتها الثقافية. ولتبرير سياسات الهجرة التعسفية هذه، تستند النخب السياسية إلى تبريرات ينبثق جلها من أفكار مسبقة الهدف منها تجريم المهاجرين واعتبار الهجرة مسألة أمنية. ومع ذلك، فإن نظرة أكثر موضوعية لظاهرة الهجرة ستظهر عدم تأسيس هذه الحجج، وستثبت، على العكس من ذلك، أن الهجرة، حينما تُدار بطريقة عقلانية، يمكن أن تكون لها آثار إيجابية واضحة على كل من البلدان المستقبلة والبلدان الأصلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهجرة، المنافع، الأضرار، الصور النمطية، كسر الأفكار المسبقة،

* Corresponding author BENTEBIBEL Doria Yasmina Email bentebibel.doriayasmina@univ-alger3.dz

Introduction:

Migration flows are inevitable and continuous. Since the world is world, individuals have always migrated to increase their chances of improving their standard of living, finding a job, studying, joining other members of their families or fleeing persecution, violence, wars or natural disasters. It is difficult to imagine a world in which the growing free movement of capital, goods and services would not be accompanied by human mobility. The main objective of this paper is to deconstruct the prejudices that surround the migratory phenomenon, and which are instrumentalised in order to justify the adoption of drastic measures of migration control.

This research therefore proposes to offer analysis keys that would make it possible to apprehend, in a slightly more objective way, the so mystified migration question.

Migration: A natural population process:

Due to globalisation, population movements are faster, more visible and are operated on a larger scale (Martínez-Solimán, 2016). Today, the world counts more than 281 million migrants, a record figure which means that 3,6 % of the world's population are living outside their country of origin, and this figure continues to grow (UNIOM, 2022, p. 21). Given the scope of international migration, and the variety of potential migrants—from involuntary asylum seekers fleeing conflict and war to international students and skilled migrants voluntarily seeking new opportunities—it is not surprising that migration has emerged as a dominant and divisive issue in international politics (Esses, 2021, p. 504).

To adapt to this phenomenon, States adopt different migration policies which are characterised, particularly in developed countries, by a restrictive nature. Immigration is considered as a threat requiring security measures. States view irregular migrants as a menace to territorial sovereignty and national security, as a challenge to the State's economy and to the cultural composition of the nation. The common use of the term “illegal migration” also reflects an association between irregular migration and criminality which is problematic in several respects (Atak, 2017). In response to these perceptions, States have implemented increasingly restrictive procedures to control immigration: visa restrictions, border controls, expulsions and sanctions (Francisco Morino, 2015).

The criminalisation of emigration by certain States has fuelled feelings of xenophobia, and led to the emergence of a public opinion hostile to emigration. This security paranoia often serves political purposes, and is exacerbated during election campaigns (Marclay, 2006, p. 20). The use of migration for political ends is not new. The American political scientist Kelly M. Greenhill coined the term “weaponization of migration” to refer to the use of migration as a weapon of political and military warfare (Garcés, 2022). The instrumentalisation of migration for political ends has however often produced counterproductive effects. Restrictive migration policies have, paradoxically, had harmful and negative results.

Indeed, the History of immigration teaches us that as long as hard restrictions continue to exist, ineligible people will enter the country in secret, or, if a temporary visit was permitted, remain in the country, building a set of unauthorised residents (Jasso, 2021). The major European survey "Migrations between Africa and Europe", conducted both in the countries of departure and those of arrival, concluded that the closing of borders has contributed to increase the number of immigrants instead of reducing it, and that the return rate of Africans to their countries has decreased as a consequence to visa restrictions. In France, for example, since the end of labour migration in 1974, migrants visiting their country of origin were afraid of not being able to return to France and began to bring their families. Family reunification has been consolidated and has fixed these immigrants on the French soil (Laure Cailloce, 2018). A study carried out by the University of Oxford in 2016 revealed that a 10 per cent increase in asylum rejections raises the number of irregular migrants by on average two to four per cent, and similarly, a 10 per cent increase in short-stay visa rejections leads to a four to seven per cent increase in irregular border entries (Czaika, 2016, p. 1).

All these examples constitute a clear illustration of the counterproductive effects that restrictive migration policies are likely to produce.

Indeed, the obstacles that dot the entire migratory paths have not prevented the continuity of the history of legal and/or illegal migration to the imagined "Eldorado" (Belaidi, 2015). Measures to contain irregular migration flows fail in achieving their purpose. By a curious paradox, the borders erected as impassable walls encourage, on the contrary, migrants to develop increasingly elaborate strategies to try to reach a space that they consider more prosperous than the one they live in. Migration policies based on repressive devices are a failure because they do not take into account the nature of flows and ignore that migration is a population process and a human phenomenon. They fail because they neglect an elementary component of the human being which is hope. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to degrade the hope of a person living in difficult conditions and who wants to reach a place imagined as carrying life (Aragon, 2016). It is even more difficult to stop people who are ready to die. Roads do not close, they change. Strengthening control does not make borders impermeable. The passage continues, but only becomes longer, more expensive and above all more dangerous. This has led to a serious humanitarian crisis resulting in the loss of thousands of human lives following unsuccessful attempts to cross the borders.

Indeed, overly restrictive migration policies push migrants to take ever more dangerous routes and risk their lives to reach Europe. The tightening of entry conditions for migrants paradoxically leads to increase irregular migration, human trafficking and illegal introduction of migrants. These are all phenomena that can have particularly serious consequences both economically and in terms of security and human rights (OIM, 2004, p. 3). Such dynamics, well documented for instance along the Mexico-US border, can be observed in the African continent and elsewhere in the world (Roman, 2020).

Moreover, the criminalisation of irregular migration has led to the delegitimisation of the right to asylum. States are often reluctant to register asylum seekers whom they consider to be potential economic migrants. This has contributed to delegitimising genuine asylum seekers and preventing them from accessing a protection which is inscribed in the international obligations of States (Atak, 2017).

The debate on all these questions should reconsider migration policies, particularly in host countries, by demystifying migration and taking another look at this phenomenon, which is all in all natural and inevitable.

Indeed, many prejudices and misconceptions surround the migratory phenomenon. We will try to deconstruct some of them:

First received idea:

“ The migratory phenomenon is taking on alarming proportions”:

According to the latest figures available, there are nearly 272 million migrants in the world today (CIRE, 2021, p. 8), which is 100 million more than in 1990, but we must take into consideration the fact that the world population has continued to grow over this period. Proportionally, immigrants represented 2.9% of the world population in 1990. They are now 3.4%, a rate which remains low. This figure can be increased to 4% to take account of undeclared migration. This means that more than 95% of the world's population has not moved, and has remained sedentary. We are therefore far from the tidal wave described by some politicians and analysts (Laure Cailloce, 2018), and we have thus to temper the received idea according to which the migratory phenomenon is taking on alarming proportions.

Second received idea:

“ North countries are "invaded" by migrants who are flocking from the South” :

Today, if the world counts 272 million international migrants, it should be noted that more than 100 million live in a developing country (Martínez-Solimán, 2016). Statistics report an increase in South-South flows which are more important than South-North flows, and also an increase in North-South movements to middle-income countries (CDE, 2016).

In reality, only a minority of migrants (35% in 2017) moves from countries of the South to countries of the North. They are, moreover, slightly more numerous (38%) to go from South to South. The others go from North to North (22%) or from North to South (5%) (CIRE, 2019, p. 9). These figures contribute to mitigate the idea according to which developed countries are about to be invaded by migrants who come in droves from developing countries.

The widespread idea which considers that it is the poor of the countries of the South who flee to the rich countries of the North should therefore be strongly nuanced. Michel Rocard's famous sentence pronounced in 1989 according to which "we cannot accommodate all the misery of the world" continues to sound like a slogan, but it does

not describe reality. Contrary to popular beliefs, it is not the populations of the poorest countries, those where one earns on average less than 1005 dollars per year and per person, who migrate the most, because to migrate, one needs a minimum of means. It is the “low middle” or “high middle” income countries, according to the World Bank categories, that migrate the most, either among themselves or to “high” income countries where average income is estimated at \$12,000 per year per person. In the end, there is relatively little direct migration from the poorest countries to the richest ones. The metaphor that imagines migrants flowing automatically from poor countries to rich ones, or from overpopulated areas to underpopulated ones, does not describe reality in any way (Laure Cailloce, 2018).

Thus, Europe only hosts a small proportion of refugees, against 90% of refugees in the world being hosted in developing countries. The Middle East alone hosts a third of the world refugees. In Lebanon, there are 1 million Syrian refugees for a population of 4 million. Only 10% of refugees in the world are hosted by Europe, United States, Canada and Australia, and contrary to popular beliefs, the majority of migrants living in Europe do not come from Africa or Asia, but two-thirds of them (66%) come from another European country (CIMADE, 2019, p. 17).

Third received idea:

“Immigration is a threat to the economies of host countries”:

Immigration has a potential cost which translates into job losses, downward pressure on wages, strong demand for infrastructure and public services (housing, transport, schools, health services) and issues relating to national security, social cohesion and stability (OIM, 2004, p. 5).

However, all the literature reviews yielded the same result : migrations have either no impact on the economy - in terms of changes in wages or unemployment, or even economic growth - or a slight positive impact. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), immigration is in no way a threat to the economy. Immigration has a neutral or even a positive effect on the main variables of a country's economy.

Indeed, migrations have no negative impact on the economy because work is not a fixed quantity that we share. The arrival of some does not automatically put others out of work. Migrants are themselves producers and consumers (Theobald, 2016). Moreover, emigrants have so far often held jobs that add a complement to the labour market of the host country, rather than replacing natives in their jobs. An OECD study conducted over a ten- year period (2001-2011) concluded that immigrants accounted for 15% of entries into employment in growing trades and sectors, but 28% in declining trades. In other words, while the natives are abandoning the sectors without prospects, it is the foreigners who come to meet the needs of the job market (Jacquin, 2015). An American study carried out in 2019 revealed that in March 2018, fully 36 percent of workers in the farming, fishing, and forestry fields were immigrants, as were 36 percent of building, grounds cleaning and maintenance workers, 27 percent of hotel workers,

and 21 percent of home health care industry workers (Sherman, 2019, p. 2). A 2020 report from the U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee said that immigrants work “on the front lines of the fight against coronavirus pandemic, particularly in healthcare,” placing them at severe risk for contracting COVID-19 (Mollenkamp, 2023). In France, despite an unemployment rate above 10%, the Medef at the end of 2014 in its annual study estimated the number of unfilled jobs at 320,000 in all sectors, ranging from industry to personal services. This research demonstrates that the presence of immigrant workers has rather played the role of a “factor of acceleration of the social advancement” of natives who are pushed towards more qualified and better paid jobs (Jean-Baptiste Jacquin, 2015). Another advantage highlighted by the think tank BSI Economics: migratory flows increase demand by stimulating consumption which “potentially creates jobs” in other sectors.

What impact of emigration on growth?

In a study published in June 2018, CNRS researchers concluded, regarding the specific case of asylum seekers and on the basis of data collected from 15 European countries, that an influx of migrants leads to an increase in GDP per capita valued at 0.32% over two years. In the medium and long term, immigrants are also more inclined to go into business. According to a study held by the National Venture Capital Association, out of 10,000 immigrants in the United States, 62 start a business, a rate twice as high as for natives.

According to economists from the McKinsey Global Institute, immigrants contributed by nearly 10% of global GDP in 2015, while they represented only 3.4% of the international population (Dépêche, 2018). Another study carried out by the US National academies of Sciences in 2020 revealed that immigrants added \$2 trillion to the U.S. GDP in 2016 and \$458.7 billion to State, local, and federal taxes in 2018. It added that Proposed cuts to US legal immigration system would have devastating effects on American economy, decreasing GDP by 2% over twenty years, shrinking growth by 12.5%, and cutting 4.6 million jobs. Rust Belt states would be hit particularly hard, as they rely on immigration to stabilise their populations and revive their economies (fwd.us, 2020).

What impact of emigration on public finances?

Immigration is often perceived as an aggravating factor for public finances, especially in countries like France or Italy, which are heavily indebted. The argument generally put forward is that immigrants receive more social benefits than they contribute. An assertion that is more a popular belief, according to Anthony Edo, who judges the tax impact of immigration "globally neutral", because if the State must ensure the social protection of migrants, the latter are often young and active. According to the OECD, foreigners are thus over-represented among social benefit recipients in the first years following their arrival, but then contribute positively to the economy, due to the fact that they belong to a favourable age structure and that they weigh less on retirees (Dépêche, 2018).

Moreover, demographic change and the aging of the population in developed countries make immigration increasingly necessary to guarantee the survival of social security systems, and particularly pension systems. Indeed, the world population is ageing. There were only 14 million people over the age of 80 living in 1950. There are well over 100 million today, and current projections indicate there will be nearly 400 million people over 80 by 2050. With fertility collapsing to below replacement levels in all regions except Africa, experts are predicting rapidly rising dependency ratios and a decline in the OECD workforce from around 800 million to close to 600 million by 2050. The problem is particularly acute in North America, Europe and Japan (Goldin, 2016). The UN Population Division concluded in its report published in December 2016, that during the first half of the 21st century, and in the absence of migration, the decline of populations in most developed countries will be greater than projections, and their aging will go on accelerating (ONU, 2016).

Over the last 10 years, according to the OECD, immigrants have contributed to 47% of the increase in the labour force in the United States and 70% in Europe” (Cheyvialle, 2016). According to a simulation carried out by the National Bank of Belgium in 2020, the immigration that took place between 2013 and 2017 reduced the proportion of retired people in Belgium. It also pushed up the Gross National Product (GNP) by 3.5%. One of the main reasons is that most of these migrants are young and educated (CIRE, 2021, p. 17).

As the 2017 National Academy of Sciences report notes, “The vast majority of current and future net workforce growth will be accounted for by immigrants and their U.S.-born descendants.” This is particularly important given the economic and fiscal challenge posed by the retirement of the baby boom generation. By 2035, the Census Bureau projects, there will be only about 2.4 working-age adults in the U.S. for each person aged 65 or older, fewer than in any prior decade on record and down from 4.7 working-age adults in 2016. The ratio of working-age adults to children and elderly combined is expected to fall from 1.6 to 1.3 between 2016 and 2030 and remain there until at least 2060. Adding younger workers now can ease this demographic shift. Without immigrants, there would be fewer working-age adults, and workers would make up a smaller proportion of the total population (Sherman, 2019, p. 5).

Finally, migrants are important financial contributors through the transfer of money they operate to their countries of origin. The amounts thus sent are much larger than the official development assistance budgets. In 2018, at the global level, official development assistance represented 143 billion dollars, while the amounts sent by migrants to their countries of origin amounted to 529 billion dollars (Sherman, 2019, p. 27).

The impact of remittances, which constitute an important component of the economic dimension of migration, has never yet been precisely assessed. The World Bank has estimated the amount of funds sent from abroad each year through official channels at \$100 billion. Funds sent through unofficial channels could be two to three times higher (OIM, 2004, p. 5). Immigrants thus contribute, in a constructive way, to economic

development and the fight against poverty in their countries of origin, which is also one of the main causes of the migratory phenomenon.

On the basis of the above, it can be concluded that immigration can have economic advantages, for almost all the concerned actors: the countries of origin can export their surplus labour and benefit from the remittances sent by immigrant workers and investments made by their diasporas; destination countries can obtain the labour they need and stabilise or improve their productivity rate; the additional labour generated by migration helps to dampen wage growth and therefore leads to an increase in national income; migrants benefit from better working conditions and acquire new skills and knowledge, which they can then bring back to their countries of origin (OIM, 2004, p. 4).

It should be noted, however, that the positive effects of immigration on the economy can only be reaped if effective integration policies are adopted. If migrants integration policies, as like as like asylum seekers reception policies, can be costly in the short term - because the host countries have to invest in reception structures and social and health support policies -, they allow States, in the longer term, to reap the economic benefits of immigration (CIRE, 2021, p. 17).

Fourth received idea:

“Immigration is a threat to national identities”:

Few political and social issues generate as much passion and controversy as immigration. One of the most prominent concerns among anti-immigration campaigners is the idea that immigration breaks down the host society’s cultural traditions and harms its cultural identity. But is that the case? (Mesoudi, 2021).

The reality of the contemporary world is that the countries in which the population is homogeneous are much less numerous today than in the past. Multicultural societies, once exceptional, are on the way to becoming the rule (OIM, 2004, p. 8). History teaches us that immigration has been harmonious, in diversity, in several regions of the world: First in Europe which has known through different stages of its history several waves of migrants who have integrated perfectly. London, the most cosmopolitan city in the United Kingdom, where the white population represents less than half, is by far the wealthiest city in the country. Emigration has also been harmonious in other regions of the world: We could also cite the example of Canada, Australia, New Zealand or even the United States of America: The American population is almost exclusively the proceeds of immigration. American power was built thanks to and through immigration proving that it is far from being incompatible with prosperity and social cohesion (Audrey Duperron, 2013).

Migrations are likely to generate a considerable cultural impact. By moving from their culture of origin to that of their adopted country, migrants can build bridges between cultures. Multicultural workforces are best able to seize the opportunities presented to them and to form constructive multinational relationships that help boost international trade. Cultural diversity can encourage entrepreneurship, industrial

innovation, artistic and literary creativity, and many other initiatives (OIM, 2004, p. 8). A Swedish study, for example, showed that there was a positive relationship between the number of immigrants and Sweden's ability to export, because immigrants have a better knowledge of their countries of origin than natives (CIRE, 2018, p. 13). The US National Academies of Sciences revealed in a study that “the contribution of immigrants to human and physical capital formation, entrepreneurship, and innovation are essential to long-run sustained economic growth.” It added that immigrants have boosted the U.S. economy through innovation and entrepreneurship tremendously, as well as having “higher patenting rates than natives.” (Hsu, 2020).

However, if public authorities do not carefully adopt suitable integration policies, migrants could be forced to regroup in isolated communities, withdrawn into their respective traditions and cultures.

That said, migration is a two-way phenomenon based on the principle of mutual respect: If States are required to protect the fundamental rights of migrants, the latter must respect the fundamental values and the laws in force in the country of adoption, reject all forms of extremism and intolerance and work to contribute positively to the future of the societies that welcome them (OIM, 2004, pp. 6,7).

Fifth received idea:

“Immigration is a security threat”:

The terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe have resulted in establishing a kind of association between terrorism and immigration. The risk of terrorist infiltration among migrants is certainly a reality to be taken into account, but the discourse according to which all refugees are potential terrorists constitutes a serious drift (Mareschal, 2015). We are witnessing an abusive manipulation of the link between immigration and security. It is not only about the security of the territory, but also of the homeland in a cultural and societal sense. Security analysis now places immigration in the register of identity and emotion which plays on patriotism feelings (Ceyhan, 2002, p. 8). In the week after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, hate crimes against Arab and Muslim minorities in the United States escalated from less than 1 to more than 200 reported cases . In Germany, in the weeks following the three terrorist attacks perpetrated on July 2016 , attacks against refugees and their accommodation sites increased across the country. While the government warned residents against placing all asylum seekers under general suspicion because of the actions of two individuals, others were quick to perceive the terrorist attacks as a result of the increase in domestic refugee presence. “We were right in all our prophecies,” Horst Seehofer, the then minister president of Bavaria and vocal critic of chancellor Angela Merkel’s refugee policy, proclaimed in a statement following the attacks. According to him and other like-minded commentators, Islamist terrorists had finally arrived in Germany, disguised as asylum seekers and aided by the country’s liberal immigration (FREY, 2022, pp. 945,946,948).

However, a study conducted by researchers at the University of Warwick, which was published in the *Journal of Politics* in February 2016, argues on the contrary that there is no causal link between immigration and terrorism. The authors of the study, Vincenzo Bove and Tobias Böhmelt, used data from the World Bank and the Global Terrorism Database of the University of Maryland to analyse the information available on migration flows in 145 countries, on a thirty year period .

The conclusions of this research show that while terrorism can rely on migration networks to recruit and spread its ideology, the flows of migrants in themselves do not contribute to an increase in terrorism in the host countries. It is even rather the opposite : the more immigration increases, the less the terrorist threat is present.

“Migration as such, regardless of the extent of terrorism in the country of origin, leads to a decrease in the number of terrorist attacks by 0.5 to 0.6% when the number of migrants entering a country increases by 10%,” the study reports.

The study notes that while the risk of terrorist infiltration among migrants exists, it remains marginal. "Only a minority of migrants from countries where there is high terrorist activity can be associated with a rise in terrorism." (Audigane, 2016).

It is concluded, therefore, that if objective threats exist and require the tightening of certain security measures, their implementation should not be done, as is often the case, at the expense of the fundamental principles of human rights. While governments claim to strengthen their national security and that of their citizens, the stigmatisation of a community, the increased criminalisation of cross-border movements, the labelling of immigrants as "potential terrorist ", and all violations of human rights that follow, may well be counterproductive with regard to the intended security objective (Marclay, 2006).

The preceding analysis clearly demonstrates the extent of the mystification to which the migratory phenomenon is subject, and the number of received ideas that surround it and which often find fertile ground in certain political and media circles that maintain them. This leads us to the need to bring a slightly more moderate and objective vision of the migratory phenomenon which certainly takes into account the challenges raised by population movements, but also the advantages that they are likely to generate and the potential that they contain, in order to draw the outlines of an adequate and effective migratory policy which would aim to attenuate the costs and negative effects of migratory flows and to reinforce their positive effects.

Conclusion :

The question is no longer whether or not to accept the principle of migration. It is rather a question of implementing adequate solutions that would make it possible to effectively manage this phenomenon which is inevitable and continuous. To this end, the international community must develop constructive management policies away from drastic measures and restrictive procedures which, as we have seen, produce counterproductive effects.

Restrictive migration policies create “irregular” migration that States paradoxically combat by implementing ever more secure policies contributing to create a vicious circle that is difficult to break.

The international community should opt for a collective and global approach aiming at formulating the most suitable strategies which would take into consideration both the costs and the advantages of contemporary migration, so that, it becomes possible to gain the maximum potential from the growing migration that is taking place on a global scale. As John Stuart Mill forcefully argued, we need to ensure that the local and short-term social costs of immigration do not detract from its role “as one of the primary sources of progress”.

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