

6. The migration nexus of Visegrad and Eastern partner countries: concluding remarks and political guidelines

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Despite the differences which are noticeable between and among the V4 countries and Eastern neighbouring countries related to their migration profile, scale and character of in- and outflows, the legal and political framework regarding migration issues, there are also a few similarities which can be observed. These are independent from the particular country's position at the global map of human flows, and are based on the migration strategy linked to the political agenda, the institutional frame and the practical issues of policy-making. This chapter attempts to summarize the most important challenges which V4 and Eastern partners have to face and deal with, both as a group of countries and also individually as a result of being an integral part of the world on the move, and present some recommendations addressed to policy-makers. They are one of the conclusions of the research completed during the EastMig project¹.

In countries of the former Socialist Bloc, the current democratic period began with a profound transformation process, from centrally planned economies to prosperous democratic systems – coupled with free-market economies. The transition from communist regimes to democratic systems was interconnected to a shift from modern to post-modern economies and society. Overall migratory behaviour was quickly normalized vis-à-vis the developed democratic world. The key events regarding migration were joining the EU in 2004 and the Schengen zone in 2007.

“(...) the Central-European (post-communist) countries opened their borders and soon received both transitory migrants and migrants who decided to remain for longer periods” (Drbohlav 2012, 181). Moreover, the population of these countries itself started migrating “normally”, too. There was, nevertheless, no universal pattern and no specific mechanism underlying such complex transition. The outcome of the transition is different due to the history and varied economic heritage of the different countries, and also because of the various policies they developed and applied during their respective transitions. Accordingly, the migratory patterns of the given Visegrad countries are, to some extent, different, though also sharing some common features.

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6.1 V4 countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The summary of migration profile.

Firstly, similarly to the EP countries, there are serious shortcomings within the existing migratory statistics in all the given countries manifested mainly in not covering (or covering improperly) some important migratory and integration realities/characteristics (even some key parameters like the number of emigrants), not harmonizing data sets and managerial work among respective ministries/governmental bodies, having almost no interconnections to other non-migratory databases and not releasing all possible data which are gathered.

Secondly, negative demographic developments and prospects such as ageing (low fertility rate coupled with growing life expectancy), losing “core-majority” population and especially labour force (including highly skilled persons) in some branches of economies – these are common features behind migratory movements in the Visegrad countries.

Thirdly, there is a basic legislative migratory framework which all EU countries comply with. There are, however, areas like naturalization, economic migration or immigrant integration models where individual countries, including the Visegrad ones, may and do apply, to some extent, their own approaches.

Fourthly, the main motivation behind migration to these countries is economically driven, thus, mainly attracting labour force to fill in gaps in respective labour markets whilst migrants from EP countries are mostly involved in manually rather than intellectually demanding types of jobs. Besides economic factors (working opportunities in legal as well as black markets) also political stability, geographical, cultural (including linguistic) proximity and already established migratory networks can be identified as other important “pull” factors.

Fifthly, although the spectrum of countries of migratory origin in Visegrad countries is rather colourful (accepting both EU and third-country nationals), all the countries have a remarkable inflow of Ukrainians and, by contrast, out of the EP countries – a quite low number of Georgians.

Sixthly, as the experience of many other immigration countries shows, areas of capital cities or other highly urbanized regions represent important concentrations of immigrants.

Finally, it seems that the presence of foreigners in the respective national labour markets has generally been of a complementary character so far, rather than appearing as competition.

On the other hand, there are important differences among the Visegrad countries related to various aspects of the migratory process.

First of all, only Czechia has got an enormous number of immigrants in its territory, which confirms its more mature position/phase of the migration cycle among the respective countries (Okolski 2012, Drbohlav 2012). Moreover, many of these migrants stay there for a long time or permanently. In other countries immigration is less or much less important (in both absolute and relative terms). Besides European immigrants, Asia is

also represented, mainly by Vietnamese (mostly in Czechia) and Chinese (Poland and Hungary). Currently, Poland attracts, also due to a very effective legislative background, quite important numbers of temporary, short-term immigrants mainly from Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus working mostly in agriculture and construction. Among the Visegrad countries, it is only in Poland that we can observe a very intensive (mass) emigration, or rather long-term migration especially to the United Kingdom, Ireland but also to some other EU countries (the Netherlands, Germany and Norway). This phenomenon importantly contributes to the fact that in some sectors of the Polish economy labour shortages have been apparent (this also applies to other Visegrad countries, though their emigration losses are much less intensive). Important ethnic migration movements only play a significant role in Poland (in relation to compatriots settled mostly in Ukraine and Belarus, and, of course, as for the return of Poles who had emigrated earlier) and Hungary (in relation to compatriots staying especially in Romania, Slovakia and Serbia). On the other hand, Czechia and Slovakia have no similar inflows of their compatriots.

Two other spheres showing a significant difference among Visegrad countries have been identified. Firstly, Poland and Hungary currently pull quite numerous groups of asylum seekers as compared to Czechia and Slovakia. What is common for the whole Visegrad region, however, is the fact that the number of those who are successful (were granted a refugee status) is really marginal. Secondly, while the global economic crisis had an important impact upon migratory movements in Czechia, Slovakia and Hungary (namely, it led to the decrease in the number of immigrants or employed foreigners, at least in official records) it seems that it had no similar effect in Poland.

6.2 V4 countries: guidelines for policy makers

At present, V4 countries are at the stage of becoming immigration countries with increasing numbers of foreigners who arrive with the aim of temporary or permanent stay and work (the Czechia is undoubtedly a leader in this process). At the same time, the outflow of V4 citizens (especially the young) to the “old” EU countries in searching for better job and life perspectives influences the economy and social structure in these countries (in particular in Poland and recently in Hungary). These parallel processes require an active approach by the state to manage migration processes, to take advantage of the benefits and limit their negative consequences. Among the crucial problems, the labour market shortages in particular sectors as a consequence of emigration, the centralized and passive state policy towards human flows, and the lack of integration policy towards incoming foreigners deserve special attention.

First of all, in all V4 countries there is a noticeable need for a more coherent, pro-active and comprehensive migration policy. It requires a more systematically organized and decentralized institutional system and better cooperation between the institutions at central level but also between different levels of public administration (central, regional and local). Moreover, the effective policy making process requires cooperation among (and within) all respective institutions, organizations which are responsible for dealing

with migration and integration issues: state bodies at different levels (central, regional and local), NGOs and international organizations. Migration processes are closely interrelated with other social phenomena, thus the migration policy is integrally connected to other policies, such as social, labour market, health, housing and development and should be implemented in a coordinated way (not separately). All V4 countries are at present in the process of developing their own migration strategies to respond to challenges related to dynamic human flows in the region and in the EU.

Some groups of immigrants are perceived as desirable and particularly useful due to the social and human capital (e.g. foreign students, highly-skilled immigrants, self-supporting legal residents). Special programmes have been launched in order to encourage admission and employment of these groups (e.g. employers' declaration scheme implemented in Poland in 2007, which simplified circular migration and short-term employment of foreigners from six Eastern countries). To promote legal circulation, legal stay and legal employment effectively, serious improvements are required, including the facilitation of visa application processes and border traffic by improving the daily work of consulates and border guards (to expedite the visa registration scheme and to shorten the queues both in front of the consulates and at the border check-points). There should be a serious commitment and lobbying by the political representatives of V4 countries at EU level to liberalize the visa regime with Eastern countries allied in the Eastern Partnership.

In order to implement measures encouraging the desirable groups of labour migrants (skilled/educated and/or short-term/temporary migrants) there is need for an effective system of labour market monitoring to estimate the real demand for foreign workforce (the profiles and numbers of the wanted immigrant workers in particular sectors). There is also a need to design proper instruments or improve the existing ones in order to ensure proper functioning of the system of monitoring and database regarding labour force shortages. The key issue is to identify and then "harmonize" domestic labour force demand with foreign supply, which is a problem of all V4 countries.

Taking into account the increasing population of foreign residents in V4 countries, a more active integration policy is required. The state's activities in this field need to be considered as promotional, encouraging integration efforts in early stages of the immigration process. Consequently, the state's efforts in the field of integration should concentrate on the familiarization of immigrants with living and working conditions, thus supporting them in their everyday lives and helping to counteract potential discrimination and exclusion from the society. An integral part of the integration policy should be an adequate information and educational policy related to foreigners and immigration processes. Immigration should be recognized and presented in a more balanced way, not only as a threat but also as a value and opportunity. There is a need to combat negative myths and unreasonable public fears resulting from ignorance, which are visible also among policy-makers. The role of information policy (issues of immigration and cultural diversity should be more visible in programmes in the media and based on reliable data and facts), as well as a proper educational policy (inclusion of the issue of immigration and foreigners into curricula) is crucial. These steps should be treated in a systematic way as preventive action taken against potential cultural tensions and conflicts related to the inflows of foreigners.

The key role in the integration process is played by the labour market and the workplace. There is a strong need for a higher involvement of social partners (employers, labour unions, employment services) into the process of economic integration of foreign workers, including the foreign workers themselves. As for the migrants' integration, local and regional administration bodies have so far played rather a limited role. Therefore, it is necessary to define their competencies in terms of migrants' integration in legislative framework, support them with the relevant institutional framework and adequate financial means. Furthermore, no one should be excluded from projects and any other types of support, i.e. EU migrants should become recipients of possible assistance within the integration policy too.

6.3 Eastern partner countries: Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine. The summary of migration profile.

The common problem with V4 and Eastern partner countries is the scarcity of reliable migration data. Information on foreigners (inflows and stocks) is collected by different institutions and there is no standardized and transparent system of statistical data. Therefore, a careful monitoring of the migration situation (both inflows and outflows) at central and regional levels is necessary for the realistic assessment of migration processes and preparing a feasible forecast for the future. Databases related to information on foreigners have to be unified and digitalized. The availability of reliable data and projections is a precondition for effective migration management by policy makers.

The description and explanation of the migratory situation in Eastern Partnership (EP) countries is difficult due to the fact that there are no reliable official statistical data that would cover all the migratory movements in terms of quantitative or, even less, qualitative parameters. Moreover, data referring to other socioeconomic characteristics that are closely related to migratory issues, namely, unemployment rates, are also questionable.

The given EP countries (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia) share one important common feature – their former membership within the Soviet Union and, thus, consequently, specific relations to Russia as a main successor. This long-term historical relationship is still mirrored in many social spheres, whilst political, economic, population and cultural factors play the most important role. On the other hand, since Gorbachov's "Perestrojka" in the middle of the 1980s, a new era has come, within which the given countries have started building their own history as independent states while also trying to transform their societies and coping with its communist heritage. Obviously, a deep, complex transition has not been fulfilled yet, the modernization process is delayed and the overall economic and social changes in these countries also materialized at a standard of living much lower than in the Visegrad countries, not to mention old member states of the EU (see e.g. characteristics of GDP or HDI). This fact is, of course, reflected in the volumes and directions of international migratory movements, too.

Due to the above mentioned specific relations, Russia, often accompanied with some other CIS countries, represents an important migratory region with which intensive mig-

ratory exchange has been occurring – it is true for all the four EP countries. The second important destination region is represented by the EU, including Visegrad countries. Other countries, like the USA (for all the countries) or e.g. Turkey, Canada and Israel (for Moldovans) cannot be ignored either but, in general, their role is less important. Of course, the migratory picture was different at the beginning of the 1990s, when the overall ethnic map was rearranged. People were returning home: to their newly formed countries chiefly among (“from-to”) Post-Soviet countries, or e.g. Jews were moving to Israel, Germans to Germany. With poorly performed political and socioeconomic transitions, accompanied with economic downturns (such as the financial crisis in Russia in 1998 or the recent global economic crisis which started in 2008), however, the international migratory movements in the respective countries lost their ethnic features and started following the requirements of the free labour market. Hence, over time international movements shifted from a predominantly “ethnic” nature via “shuttle” to a mostly “labour” character. Moreover, in harmony with opportunities, and, at the same time, barriers, these migrations create a very rich mosaic of various migratory types regarding the gender, educational level and industrial sector of the migrants (see the reports).

When we take into account the whole period of the Post-Soviet era, all the countries are losing their population via international migration (probably with one exception – Belarus - where losses are, according to the existing statistics, typical only in relation to non-CIS countries). This loss is, in relative terms, the most intensive in Georgia and Moldova. Anyways, also in absolute terms, the outflow figures are enormous in all the countries, with the exception of Belarus again. There are several important pull factors which trigger the movements and which are sought abroad: higher wages within existing work opportunities and a much higher living standard. Of course, geographical position, low-cost and visa-free travel, as well as common historical development and cultural similarity (mainly language) play an important role, but also already existing social networks and support of compatriots abroad are to be taken into account.

Besides “pulls”, there are also important “push factors” which the population is exposed to in their mother countries, such as an unstable political situation, economic impotence, high unemployment (often not reflected in statistics), social disorder, erosion of social infrastructures, corruption, nepotism, huge social/income stratification of the society, poverty etc., all of which considerably contribute to mass migratory outflows. They are accompanied by other, more general processes that these countries suffer from: fertility decline and ageing. Moreover, via the massive international migration movements, these countries are losing their active labour force, often young, talented, or also highly skilled workers, who, in general, create the most valuable human capital for establishing and building a new economy and society (loss of intellectual potential). There is another negative feature of the mass exodus of labour force, namely the break-up of marriages due to the long-term separation of married couples and children. Children with their parents working abroad are being brought up by grandparents, who very often cannot cope with this demanding task. To sum up, depopulation and depletion of the “viability of population structures” is a typical feature accompanying the current international migration mobility within the given countries. As a consequence, this situation also has a detrimental impact

upon the economies, in general, and some branches, in particular, creating deficits of the appropriate labour force (e.g. health care, education, research/science).

Besides many common features, in some countries there are a few migratory specificities which are worth pinpointing too.

Firstly, there are some preferential conditions from which for example Ukrainian migrants can benefit, namely: preferences for residents of border areas and preferences for seasonal workers, thus having a chance to enter, for example, the Polish labour market more easily (see more in reports).

Secondly, there is a very serious negative phenomenon of human trafficking (mainly for the purpose of forced labour, sexual exploitation, begging and possibly also trading with human organs) which is generally associated with irregular migration and migrants' irregular status in the labour market of a destination country. There is some evidence indicating that especially Moldovans might often be victims of human trafficking on a large scale in Europe.

Thirdly, in the aftermath of the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 (along with the global economic crisis) there has been a specific movement of Georgian asylum seekers (despite many internally displaced persons) towards many European, including Visegrád countries (mostly Poland).

Finally, one may deduce that the current Russian-Ukrainian political and regional conflict in Crimea predetermines reflections in terms of some significant international migratory movements.

6.4 Eastern partner countries: guidelines for policy makers

The Eastern countries have recently been facing mass emigration of the economically active population, which leads to the loss of human, labour and intellectual capital. Moreover, young people are leaving both for temporary employment and studies, with the risk of never returning due to the high level of youth unemployment, limited job and career opportunities in their home countries compared to a generally higher level of wages and living standard in countries abroad.

There are several important issues that require political decisions and solutions, among others the insufficient social and legal protection of labour migrants abroad and the negative impact of mass emigration on the social structure, demography and economy (brain drain and youth drain, shortages in the labour market, family breakdown and social orphanhood). The precondition to any political reaction is a will and readiness by policy makers to solve the problems. This could be limited in emigration countries, taking into account the fact that the outflow of citizens who are dissatisfied with their situation in the mother country could be perceived by the government as reducing the threat of potential social tensions (linked to unemployment, economic crises, permanent political conflicts). Moreover, the remittances (sometimes of a huge volume, e.g. in case of Moldova it is estimated at more than 30% of the country's GDP) provide a stable currency inflow, which is seen as a positive effect for the national economy, although they are usually spent on daily expenses, not on long-term investments.

The governments have limited power to curb emigration flows, their attempts are restricted to setting up legal frames by cooperation with destination countries and signing the bi- or multi-lateral agreements on circular (seasonal) migration. Georgia plays a leading role in this respect: in 2009, a “Partnership for Mobility” was signed between Georgia and the EU, and recently an agreement on circular migration with France (in 2013), which allows the legal employment of up to 500 Georgian citizens in France. Similar agreements are being planned also with other countries with a large Georgian diaspora. This kind of far-seeing policy based on close cooperation between source and destination countries should be regarded as good practice.

Another issue which is crucial in Eastern countries and should be treated as political priority is to prevent discrimination and exploitation (especially by employers) and to secure the rights of citizens abroad (labour migrants and their families in particular), especially those related to social security and welfare. This aim is included in the national migration strategies of all countries, however, it requires substantial commitment by the institutional system and close cooperation with destination countries and diaspora organizations abroad.

As a consequence of mass emigration, some of the Eastern countries started to implement political measures to fill the shortages in the labour market in specific sectors and regions, e.g. in Belarus and Ukraine. The National Programme of Demographic Security of Belarus attempts to attract unskilled workers to the country, especially to the rural areas by signing bilateral agreements with some states securing preferential conditions for the registration and employment of the nationals of these countries.

Mass emigration (brain drain and hand drain) is perceived as a serious obstacle to the further development of these countries. The governments are trying various steps to find a solution to this complex problem: from encouraging the investment of remittances into the local economy and small businesses rather than daily consumption (Moldova), to encouraging the employment of foreign workers to fill the gaps in the national workforce (Belarus). The reintegration of returning migrants into the labour market and society is also a problematic issue, which is not a simple task taking into account the structural differences between countries of origin and countries of destination, and high unemployment levels. This problem is recognized by political elites and some countries attempt to formulate political programs targeting potential and real returnees (e.g. in Moldova and Ukraine). The efficiency of these measures is limited in practice without serious reforms taking place in the economy and society, which, in the first place, played a role as “push factors” in the countries of emigration.

In order to stabilize international migration flows, the EP has to go (or continue to go) through a painful purifying process of a deep political and socioeconomic transition where “substitution of capital for labour, the privatization and consolidation of landholding and the creation of markets“ will be key determinants also of the future migratory development (see Massey 1988, 391). On the other hand, when characterizing the role of Visegrad countries as to how to assist the EP region in fulfilling these demanding tasks, one can only support Haas’s (2012) words: ...“immigrant-receiving governments can play a significant role in increasing the development potential of migration through lowering

thresholds for legal immigration, particularly for the relatively poor and the lower-skilled, and through favouring their socio-economic mobility through giving access to residency rights, education and employment. By deterring the relatively poor from migrating or forcing them into illegal channels, and by discouraging return and impeding circulation, restrictive immigration policies may damage the poverty-alleviating and development potential of migration“ (de Haas 2012). Obviously, close mutual co-operation between these two regions on various fronts is inevitable.

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