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The Economics of Migration

Stereotypes of migration

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Is what we hear about migration really true? questioning eight stereotypes

Edited by Philippe Fargues

Stereotype 1. “We do not need migrants”

Stereotype 2. “Migrants steal our jobs”

Stereotype 3. “We do not need low-skilled immigrants in the EU”

Stereotype 4. “Migrants undermine our welfare systems”



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Stereotype 5. “Migration hampers our capacity to innovate”

Stereotype 6. “Our southern coastline is flooded with asylum seekers”

Stereotype 7. “Economic migrants are trying to cheat our asylum system”

Stereotype 8. “Our children suffer from having immigrants in class”



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Stereotype 1: “We do not need migrants”

The idea that Europe has a large enough population and would fare better with fewer immigrants is typically a very short term vision.

Europe’s population projections show a dramatic trend of decrease and ageing that, in the absence of immigration, will translate into:

- an unprecedented reduction in Europe’s demographic weight in the world;
- the unsustainability of its welfare systems;
- the ageing of its skills.



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Stereotype 2: “Migrants steal our jobs”

Contrary to this expectation, statistical analysis shows that unemployment and immigration vary more often in opposite directions than in parallel.

On one hand immigrants are attracted by employment rather than unemployment,

and on the other hand, successful labour markets create employment for both migrants and natives, who, in many cases, are not in direct competition.



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Stereotype 3: “We do not need low-skilled immigrants in the EU”

That migration policies must be selective does not mean that only highly-skilled migrants should be selected.

Low-skilled migrants have their place in Europe’s labour markets.

They allow for the employment of natives in highly-skilled occupations and compensate for shortages of low-skilled workers in industries where they are needed.



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Stereotype 4: “Migrants undermine our welfare systems”

With larger families and higher risks of job loss, immigrants would be a burden on the welfare system, which would reduce natives’ trust in social solidarity.

On the contrary, empirical evidence shows that:

- given their age and occupational structure, migrants have on average a positive net fiscal contribution;
- immigration is accompanied by positive, more often than negative, attitudes towards social redistribution of wealth.



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Stereotype 5: “Migration hampers our capacity to innovate”

- By bringing in labour, migration would reduce incentives for firms to invest in the capital-intensive technologies where innovation takes place.
- On the contrary, empirical research shows that the immigration of highly-skilled workers, together with the diversity of origins in the workplace, play in favour of innovation.



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Stereotype 6: “Our southern coastline is flooded with asylum seekers”

Europe and particularly its southern Member States are too exposed to waves of forced migrants.

In reality: the vast majority of recent refugees are not in Europe, but in countries neighboring conflict areas in the neighbourhood of Europe;

most asylum seekers in Europe are not in Mediterranean Member States, but in Western and Northern EU.



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Stereotype 7: “Economic migrants are trying to cheat our asylum system”

Recurrent dramas in the Mediterranean have called for local responses ranging from better control of emigration from North Africa to reduce the risk of dying at sea and to open new channels of legal migration.

However, data show that many clandestine migrants are genuine asylum seekers and the roots of their drama is the lack of asylum channels in more distant regions, such as the Horn of Africa.



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Stereotype 8: “Our children suffer from having immigrants in class”

Contrary to this received idea, PISA surveys on the educational achievement of students provide evidence of a bonus, enjoyed by sons and daughters of mixed parentage,

but no handicap of children attending mixed schools when social factors are accounted for.

Put in other terms, lower educational performances are linked to social disadvantages rather than the presence of migrants.



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Hein De Haas Human Migration: Myths, Hysteria and facts

1. We live in times of unprecedented mass-migration
2. Immigration restrictions reduce the number of immigrants
3. Immigration policies have become more restrictive



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4. Development in origin countries will reduce emigration
5. Migration leads to 'brain drain'
6. Migrants steal jobs and threaten the welfare state
7. Migration can solve the ageing problem



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We live in times of unprecedented mass-migration

On myth #1: While the number of international migrants has almost doubled between 1960 and 2000, the world population has grown at the same pace. The relative rate of migration has thus remained stable, and less than three per cent of the world's population is an international migrant.

Yet the nature and direction of migration has changed. For the past centuries, it was mainly Europeans who emigrated and colonized foreign territories.

Since WWII, Europe has evolved into the world's most attractive migration destination. However, particularly since the end of the Cold War politicians have increasingly portrayed migration as a fundamental threat to security and prosperity, inflaming a panic over migration. This contributed to the incorrect idea that migration is accelerating.



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- Initial question:**
- Is international migration:**
- **Increasing?**
 - **Decreasing?**
 - **Staying the same?**



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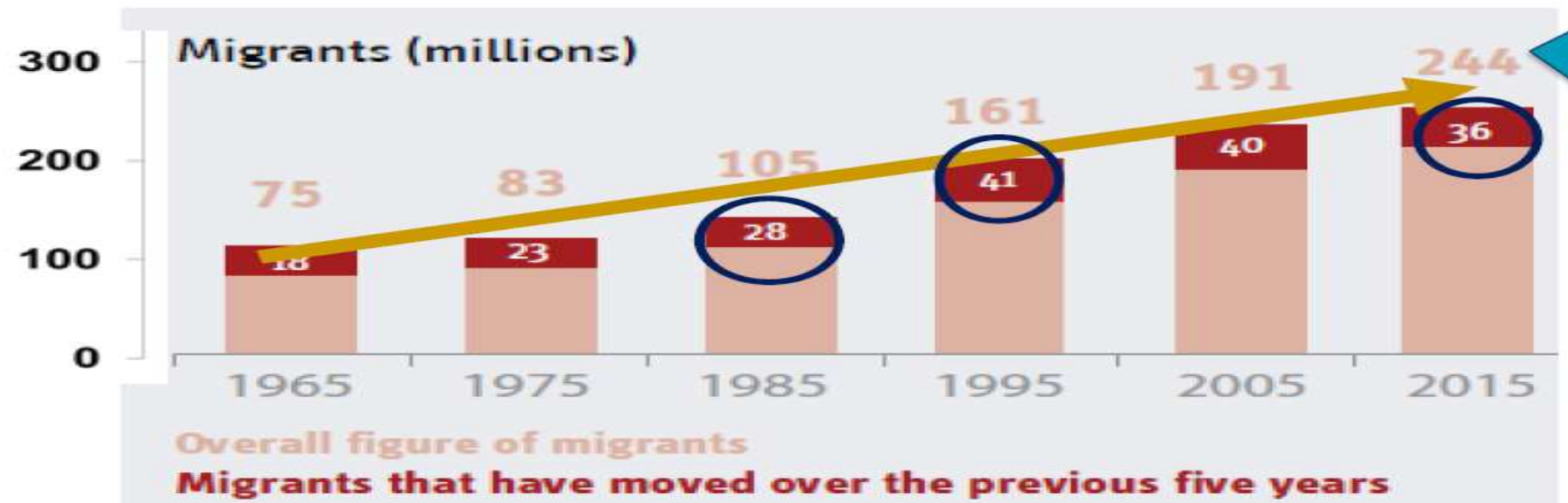
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The **number** of international migrants (**stock**) is growing, the **flow** is not growing

**Absolute numbers of migrants and number of those who
have moved over the previous 5 years, 1965-2015**

**More longevity, fewer return,
better data**



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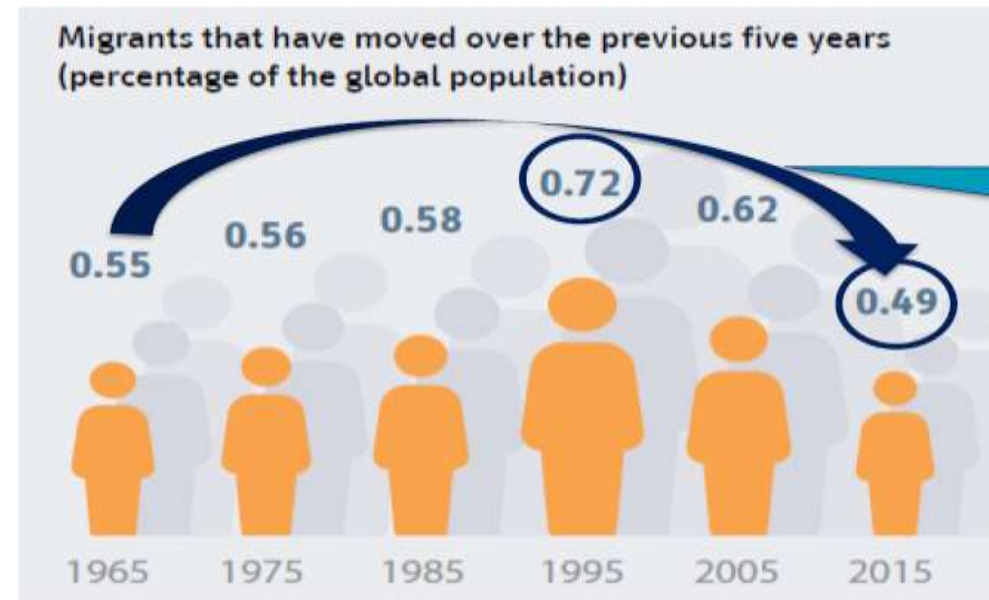
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The **share** of international migrants who have recently moved (as % of global population) is declining

Proportion of recent migrants in total population, 1965-2015



**Relative
decline
since the
1990s**



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UN Population Division, Abel



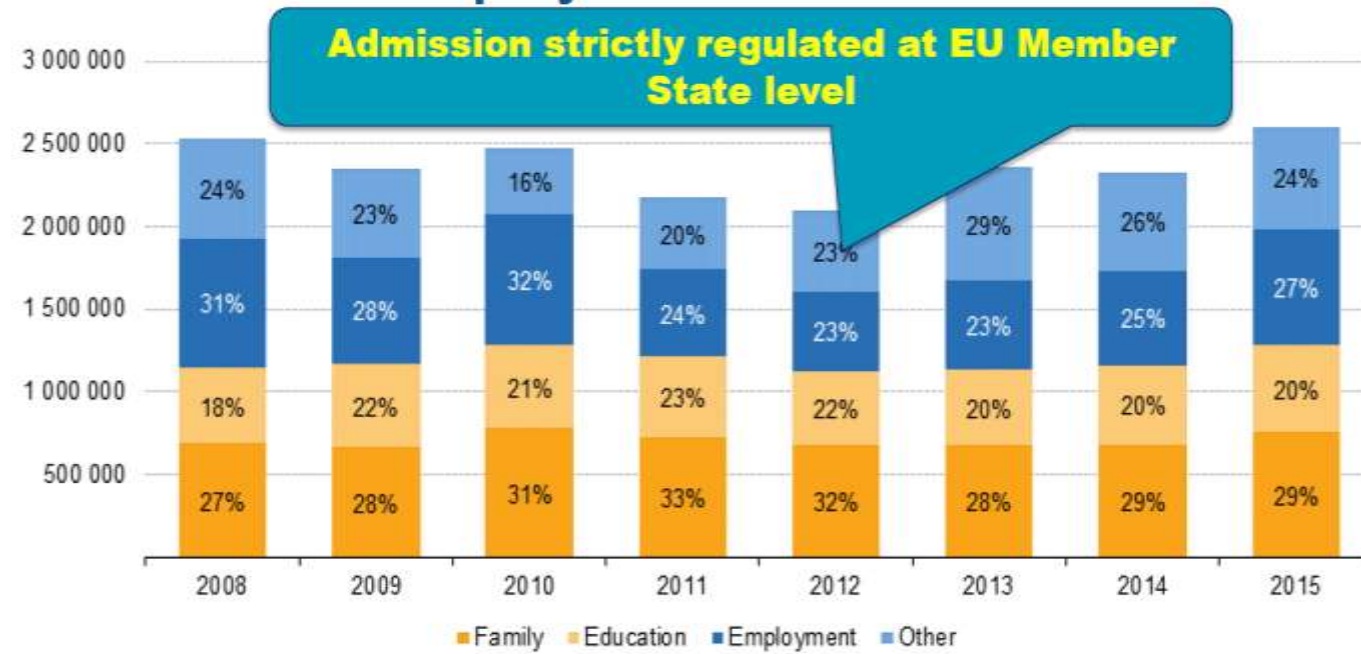
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How Many? Annual gross immigration to Europe

First residence permits by reason of entry, 2008-2015,
absolute numbers per year



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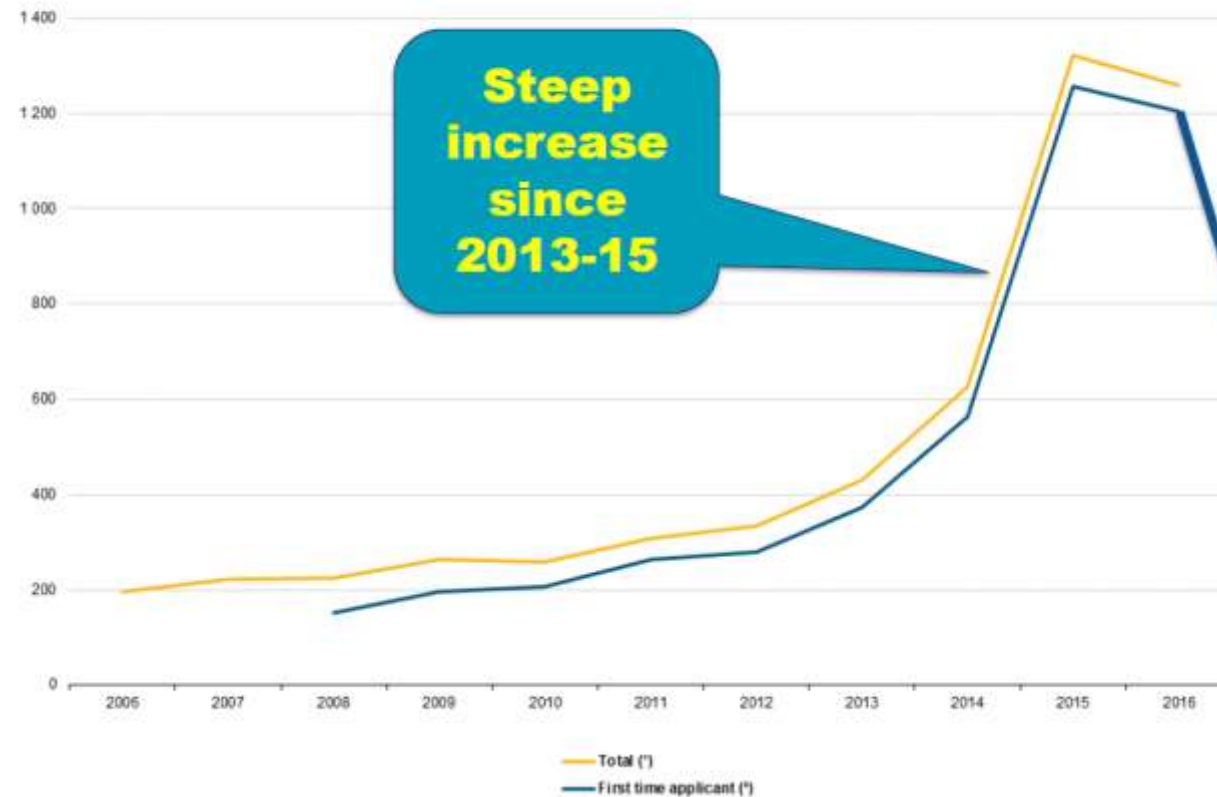
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Asylum in Europe

Asylum applications in the EU 28, 2006-2016



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Source: Eurostat



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Immigration restrictions reduce the number of immigrants

On myth #2: Recent research shows that immigration restrictions are often counter-productive by interrupting circulation, discouraging return and pushing migrants into permanent settlement.



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Immigration policies have become more restrictive

On myth #3: Although politicians like to give the impression that immigration policies have become more restrictive, research shows that policies have become less restrictive for most migrant groups over the past decades. Tough talk on migration is therefore mainly rhetoric aimed at winning elections.



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Development in origin countries will reduce emigration

On myth #4: Economic growth, education and infrastructure enable more people to migrate and increase their life aspirations. This is why migration increases as countries develop (see [here](#) and [here](#)). Economic growth of the poorest countries will therefore inevitably lead to more migration from those countries.



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Migration leads to 'brain drain'

On myth #5: It is a misunderstanding that the emigration of skilled people ('brain drain') causes underdevelopment in origin countries. The money migrants send back home ('remittances') dwarfs development aid, and many migrants invest in origin countries, although it is also an illusion to think that migrants can solve fundamental development problems such as corruption and inequality.



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Migrants steal jobs and threaten the welfare state

On myth #6: Migrants mainly do the jobs that local populations shun or for which they lack the skills. Generally, migration has a positive, but comparatively small, effect on economic growth, although it is predominantly employers, the middle classes and the wealthy who benefit from migration.



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Migration can solve the ageing problem

On myth #7: While migration is not a threat to prosperity, it is also not a solution to fundamental socio-economic problems such as ageing. The magnitude of migration is too limited, while ageing is becoming a worldwide phenomenon.



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