

Financial Crisis and Migration in Europe

Between Territorial Impacts and Sustainability of the Policies

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1. Introduction

The crisis in the financial markets that hit the global economy in mid–2008 led, as has been noted, to the most severe recession since World War II. The crisis, caused by an excessive disconnection of the financial sector from the real economy, spread across different geographies through intense adverse interconnections between various geographical regions. The European Union (EU) has also been deeply affected by the global crisis after years of stable economic and employment growth and has returned to a state of stagnation not seen for decades, while the societies and territories of its Member States have been negatively affected, albeit to varying degrees.

One consequence of the crisis that is causing acute territorial tension is the mobility of people, which is as much related to migration flows into and out of Europe as to the various effects on countries of origin and destination of these migratory flows. Other than the most discussed consequences of the crisis, such as the effect on employment and household finances, it is also interesting to consider the effects on the migration phenomenon. This because of the many implications it presents: demographic, geographic, social, political, economic, legal and so on. Immigrants, for example, make up a significant proportion of Europe's workforce: about one in 10 in major European countries and an even higher percentage in the smaller ones (Eurostat, 2012). It's easy to understand that financial crises and economic trends can seriously affect the flow of migrants arriving and departing (International Labour Organization, 2012). It's less simple to foresee the consequences that arise from a crisis in the supply of

labour in some vital sectors employing migrant workers.

Other aspects related to migration should, of course, be considered: integration in the host society, remittances sent home, regulatory policies, access to the welfare system and so on. Migration, as we know, poses significant challenges but it also offers opportunities, some of which are too good to miss. In times of crises and recession, however, these aspects tend naturally to be complicated, with consequences that aren't always clearly predictable and that are even less easy to manage (Dall'Oglio, 2009).

2. Crisis and migration flows in Europe

The implications of a crisis in migration flows depend in part on the nature of the recession, in part on its duration and on its socio-economic depth as well as on the local context under consideration. What is normally assumed is that, in the short term, during a severe and prolonged crisis, all the activities that characterise globalisation — from the flow of capital and goods to the flow of people — run the risk of decreasing and slowing down. In the medium term, however, the migration of people in search of new sources of income may increase, while, in the long term, the new paradigm that emerges after a crisis, between countries of origin and destination, would also translate as a change in the world order of migration. This, of course, could also happen without a crisis. But crises accelerate this effect. Therefore, the interaction of crisis and migration could have a huge impact on the transformation of society (Düvell, 2009).

In Europe, in general, emigration has been reactivated, while immigration has slowed. This is particularly true in countries that registered large inflows of migrant workers in the pre-crisis period, countries for which immigrant labour was the main flow of immigration. Ireland, Spain, and the United Kingdom, for example, have all recorded a fall of net migration flow. Even countries that are not among the main importers of foreign labour, such as Latvia, however, have recorded lower levels of immigration (Koehler et al., 2010). The severity of the crisis in Spain and Italy, which had absorbed most of Romanian and Bulgarian migrants before 2008, has redirected migration flows towards Germany (Bertoli et al., 2013). With reference to Italy it should

also be noted an inversion of internal migration flows. Migration has taken place from the north to the south where the possibility of doing irregularly¹ temporary work has re-emerged as a decisive factor (De Filippo and Morlicchio, 2010).

However, net migration, although declining, was still positive in the years following the outbreak of the crisis in many of the major European destination countries, such as Spain, Italy and the UK. This indicates that these countries continued to receive migrants despite the crisis (Beets and Willekens, 2009).

Furthermore, in many European countries, the demand for skilled migrants in certain sectors such as healthcare has not been interrupted. The economic and financial crisis, in fact, has not affected all international migrants in the same way. Empirical evidence suggests (Duncan and Waldorf, 2010) that the effects of the crisis have caused a polarisation of skills, which has allowed highly skilled migrants to achieve the most favourable results or, at least, their situation has been less unfavourable compared to lower-skilled workers. This is because the policy responses from governments to protect the national labour markets and appease voters are often directed at unskilled workers², rather than skilled migrants. It's also true that skilled immigrants have been affected by the cuts imposed by recruitment limits because of the crisis and the higher qualifications required for entering foreign labour markets.

The types of occupations, skills and financial resources characteristic of highly skilled migrants has enabled them to manage better during the crisis. Moreover, at a time when an ageing population and declining fertility rates are the norm almost everywhere, the demand for qualified human capital is high, particularly for developed countries where the emergence of the knowledge economy is now taking place (Giordano et al., 2012).

1. The illegal migrant population probably increased during the crisis. This is not so much due to new illegal immigrant flows but rather because migrants were staying in the country of destination after their visas expired and then sought work in the black market economy. Fix et al., 2009.

2. Immigrants are employed mainly in low-skilled occupations and in some cases, especially during economic recessions, compete with native workers in the country of destination. In addition, they are not always entitled to welfare benefits, so these workers are particularly vulnerable in times of crisis. This could also reflect on their ability to integrate socially and economically. PAPADEMETRIOU et al., 2009.

There is also some evidence that the crisis has affected the gender composition of the immigrant workforce, with more female than male migrants. This is partly due to an increase in unemployment in male-dominated sectors, such as construction, and partly due to constant demand in sectors dominated by women, such as domestic work and personal care. This selective migration has led to an increase in female immigrants' share of total migrants in some European countries, such as Spain, Italy and Ireland (Global Migration Group, 2009).

A further aspect to consider is the possible relationship between the global financial crisis and another form of migration: forced migration, which can encompass refugees, environmental migrants and «internally displaced people» (IDP). Although it's not always easy to find a direct correlation between the two phenomena — crisis and forced migration — and even if some of the causes that lead to forced migration are not easily identifiable (Giordano, 2013), one can still reflect, particularly on the paradoxical reduction in the number of official requests for asylum³. This would effectively constitute a contradictory trend compared to the total number of forced migrants, which is nonetheless rising, as is confirmed by the most recent United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees report (2013). This perverse finding may be not so much a direct consequence of the financial crisis on forced migration, but rather because receiving states, subject to the tensions of the crisis, have probably introduced stricter laws and policy measures than those already applied in the past decade to discourage and limit requests for asylum (Zetter, 2009).

Finally, it should be noted that when, during the crisis, the levels of emigration increased in some EU countries, it's not clear how many of these migrants return to their country of origin or whether they move on to other destinations inside or outside Europe. However, there is some evidence that during the crisis, foreigners from other EU countries migrated in greater numbers than non-EU citizens (Papademetriou et al., 2010). In countries such as Ireland and the

3. This is a reference specifically to refugees, as internally displaced persons and environmental migrants do not currently receive any form of international legal protection (as is the case for political, religious, sexual, ethnic and racial refugees who have a special status guaranteed by the Geneva Convention of 1951). IDPs predominantly migrate internally within countries so they are not considered within the parameters of this article.

UK, which have particularly attracted migration from EU countries in recent years, the levels of emigration of EU citizens were, in fact, very high compared to those of non-EU migrants, even though the latter were more often affected by unemployment (Krings, 2010). The different attitudes to migration seen in EU and non-EU citizens may be partly due to the fact that European immigrants encounter fewer obstacles in re-entering the European labour market compared non-EU immigrants. Taking into account the geographical dynamic centre-periphery, it has to be said that net migration to the core of Europe has been increasing, while net migration to the periphery has dropped sharply (Holland and Paluchowski, 2013).

3. The effects of the crisis on migrants in some European countries

One of the first effects of the crisis was higher unemployment rates between 2008 and 2009 for foreign workers (including those from EU countries) compared with native-born workers, an increase that was more marked in Estonia, Spain, Portugal, Latvia, Ireland, France and Austria. In general, the employment situation for migrant workers, particularly for citizens of third countries, has deteriorated more rapidly than that of immigrants from other European countries. Non-EU foreign workers have, in fact, been particularly affected by the deterioration of working conditions. While the unemployment rate for citizens of other EU countries increased by 2.8 percentage points between 2008 and 2009, the rate for non-EU citizens increased by 5 per cent during the same period (Koehler et al., 2010). The difference may be partly explained by the high concentration of non-EU workers in sectors with high cyclical demand such as construction, retail and hospitality (Manservigi, 2009). Another factor could be that EU citizen migrants are more likely to return to their country of origin if they find themselves unemployed.

The economic downturn may have also led to greater inter-sectoral mobility among migrant workers in search of employment opportunities in sectors other than those in which they were employed. For example, in Spain there is evidence that foreign workers in the construction industry are increasingly taking on agricultural work.

Moreover, in response to rising levels of unemployment, greater numbers of migrant workers are opting for self-employment. In the Czech Republic (Koehler et al., 2010) and Italy, for example, there has been an increase in the number of immigrants who have registered as self-employed since 2009 (Direzione Generale dell'Immigrazione e delle Politiche di Integrazione, 2013). At the same time, with reference to Italy it should also be noted a persistent gap in the salaries (the foreign workforce tends to be paid less than the Italian equivalent), this confirming the "vulnerability" of the foreign workforce, that still seems to be one of the "weak rings" of the national productive system (Brusa and Papotti, 2011).

Before the crisis, immigrants were less likely than residents to receive social assistance in many of the new destination countries such as Spain, Italy and Ireland. There is some evidence that this model has changed, with more immigrants registered for unemployment benefits and social assistance than before.

In Germany and Spain, the global economic crisis has had very different effects on the jobs markets in general and on migrant workers in particular. This can be explained by observing their growth paths before the crisis took hold in each country. In Spain, the very intense growth rate of work was made possible by the increase of jobs employing immigrants, supported by permissive immigration policy. In Germany, on the other hand, a restrictive immigration policy prevented the increase in labour supply and encouraged more intensive capital growth, in which both low-skilled Germans and immigrants have found it difficult to integrate. Therefore, it is argued (Godenau et al., 2012) that the institutional characteristics of these types of jobs market have supported the different paths of development. It should also be noted that temporary and informal jobs in Spain have been hit hardest by the crisis, thus exacerbating the vulnerability of immigrant workers and youth.

The changed economic conditions of immigrants have also affected their capacity to send remittances. Just as migratory flows decreased during the crisis, remittances sent by migrants from some EU countries also fell. What is important is that the decline in remittances is only in part attributable to migrants who are sending less money, while another factor is the increase of emigration (which has, therefore, decreased the number of potential remitters). Moreover, the

financial crisis has led to modest but noticeable outward migration from Europe, mostly because some migrants are returning to their home. Remittance-sending behaviour during the crisis has also been noted to vary between different groups of migrants. Another factor, related to the appreciation and depreciation of various currencies, has also affected the amount of remittances sent (Barajas et al., 2010; Cali and Dell'Erba, 2009; Martin, 2009; Meins, 2009; Mohapatra and Ratha, 2010; Ratha et al., 2013; Sirkeci et al., 2012).

4. Policies for migrants in EU territories during the crisis

Migration policy changes that occurred during the crisis vary from country to country in the EU and they are characterised by different effects that depend on the social and territorial contexts in question. The main adjustments related to entry, which became more restrictive — including, for example, reductions in quotas and work permits or limits for family reunification — and voluntary repatriation programmes, such as those implemented by Spain (Plewa, 2012; Pusti, 2013) and the Czech Republic (Koehler et al., 2010). Other responses were focused, however, on further measures to combat illegal immigration and illegal employment.

However, it must be said that changes in immigration policy in European countries have not only been restrictive. Provisions have also been made, for example in Ireland, for visa extension and allowing migrants already present who have lost their job the opportunity to find new employment. Sweden, on the other hand, has sought to identify new channels for immigrant labour through the introduction of a renewed migration policy (Kuptsch, 2012). At an EU level, the adoption of the Stockholm Programme (European Commission, 2010), which includes a number of measures to facilitate labour migration during the crisis, shows the extent to which migration remains a priority for the EU, despite obvious failings⁴.

4. The influence of international organisations on European migration has increased significantly since the beginning of the twentieth century. However, this change has not always meant a greater say in the migration policies of individual states. At the moment, the European Commission can, at best, promote immigration policies that often complete national policies, rather than affect them. GLYNN, 2012.

As was the case with developments in the field of migration policy, changes in the labour market and social policies, which naturally have consequences for migrants, have taken shape according to the particular territorial contexts and the national social systems and employment markets. In all EU Member States, migrants have been subjected, depending on their status, to decreases in social welfare entitlements (such as social housing in the UK). At the same time, they have also been able to benefit from training opportunities, such as a Portuguese programme for immigrant entrepreneurship (Taran, 2012).

The European Economic Recovery Plan (European Commission, 2008) put in place by the European Commission includes an initiative to support employment, which seeks to prevent an excessive rise in redundancies and rising unemployment through a focus on improving skills and retraining. The plan supports short-term recovery as well as the long-term growth needed for competitiveness, in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy (European Commission, 2010) for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Many national economic stimulus programmes followed similar guidelines, taking into account the different capacities of EU countries to initiate or support such response policies. The extent to which migrants have been able to benefit from these stimulus plans is not empirically clear, and depends on how the migration, labour market and social policies have interacted in a given local context, as well as the status of the migrant and position in the jobs market.

Therefore, it is very difficult to speak in terms of a single European response on migration policy across the continent. Rather, there have been a range of responses that reflect the particular situations of Member States. Moreover, the extent to which certain immigration or employment policies have been changed in response to the crisis is not clear in all cases; some may also have been the result of a process of political reform already under way before the crisis began.

5. Conclusions

The policies that governments put in place during a crisis should take into account economic and demographic factors both in the short and

the long term. If Europe is to become more economically competitive and wishes to respond adequately to the serious demographic challenges it faces in terms of ageing, it is very likely that migration will have to increase further in the future. The migrant population is generally young and is of vital importance to the European demographic pyramids, which have ever smaller productive age groups (Grimm, 2012)⁵. This is therefore a matter of highly strategic importance for the whole of the EU and the policies put in place by various European governments should be analysed from this perspective.

While the tightening of immigration controls, seen in several destination countries throughout the EU, may seem politically attractive in the short term, on the other hand they run the risk of ignoring the long-term demand for migrant workers. When it comes to investment in integration, while bearing in mind that European governments have been and still are under intense pressure to make budget cuts, it should be noted that these investments were generally reduced just when the immigrant population was at its most vulnerable (Collet, 2011). A more prudent investment policy for integration would not only be useful in alleviating the growing threat of social exclusion, but would enable migrants to contribute more effectively to economic recovery. In addition, conditions that allow unemployed immigrants to legally stay in the host country while they seek alternative employment, as is the case in some EU countries, can help counter the problems of overstaying visa terms and enable migrants to legally look for formal employment.

Access to the social security system should be guaranteed, seeing as the level of vulnerability of migrants may also be influenced by their guaranteed access to social protection and welfare benefits. This applies, of course, especially to newly arrived immigrants or to certain groups of migrants not eligible for social assistance. Past crises show that periods of economic recession can be an opportunity to expand social safety nets to include larger segments of the population and increase the resilience of individual families as well as of societies and territories (Koser, 2009).

5. This doesn't apply to countries with a low median age and, therefore, a substantially balanced demographic pyramid capable of ensuring the so-called "demographic window of opportunity", i.e., with a substantial part of the population of productive age, as in the case of Turkey (GIORDANO, 2014) and Iran (GIORDANO, 2011).

An intelligent planning policy should therefore also aim to combat discrimination and xenophobia and to raise awareness in the local population of how migrants contribute to enrich the host country in both economic and social terms. Efforts to increase this awareness should be particularly underlined during periods of crisis, when negative public opinion on migrant workers may be more prevalent. In the past, it has been shown that even in a recession, many natives were not willing to take on jobs typically done by migrants. It would therefore be short-sighted to believe that immigrants serve as a safety valve for developed economies, providing employment in times of expansion and going away in the early stages of recession (Castles and Vezzoli, 2009). One aspect that should be emphasised is cooperation with migrants' countries of origin. Agreed temporary migration programmes may, in fact, help maximise the economic benefits of migration, even in times of crisis (Dadush and Falcao, 2009).

As regards, however, the levels of qualification of migrants, which can be differentiated according to country, one should consider not only the short-term impact of the crisis, but also the need for job growth and skills in the long term. Of course, skills shortages continue to exist in both high and low skilled sectors are also relevant to the local workforce. Immigration restrictions, quota limitations and other control measures should therefore be balanced with flexible channels for legal migration for employment in professions and sectors that may be necessary for the future and sustainable development of European territories.

Migration flows are, in fact, closely related to development, both in the country of origin, for example through remittances (Giordano and Terranova, 2013), as well as in the host nation, by rejuvenating the population and contributing to the local labour market (Skeldon, 2010). It is therefore farsighted to adopt a medium to long-term approach to migration policies, rather than restricting the response to a period of crisis.

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