
Geographical characteristics of contemporary international migration in and into Europe

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Abstract

The study analyses and examines the global and regional causes of recent migration to Europe (the European Economic Area /EEA), the countries of origin of the migrants, the main routes of migration, and the destination areas in Europe. From among the various and multidisciplinary research possibilities, the study focuses on a geographical analysis. As far as intercontinental migration is concerned, Europe was characterized by emigration between the 16th and mid-20th centuries (partly in consequence of colonization) and mainly by immigration thereafter. Immigration has principally affected Western Europe, the more developed part of the continent. In consequence of post-WWII reconstruction, dynamic economic development, local labour shortages, and the decolonization process, Western Europe received many migrants, initially from the Mediterranean region and subsequently (i.e. after the collapse of communism in 1989/90) from the post-communist European countries. Meanwhile, the core areas of the EEA became the main destination for migrants coming from predominantly Muslim regions in Asia and Africa (SW Asia, Muslim Africa). This decades-old process has recently accelerated and now constitutes mass migration. The global and regional causes of such intercontinental migration in the sending areas are as follows: the population boom, economic backwardness, unemployment, growing poverty, climate change, desertification, negative ecological changes, global political rivalries and local power changes (e.g. the Arab Spring, 2011), growing political instability, wartime destruction, multiple and cumulative crises, general hopelessness and despair. Partly in consequence of the events of the "Arab Spring" of 2011, in 2015 a wave of mass migration – mostly illegal immigration, with vast numbers of asylum seekers – reached Europe from adjacent regions in Asia and Africa. The main features distinguishing this European migration crisis from earlier crises were: the arrival in the EU of an unprecedented number of migrants/refugees (the highest number since the Second World War); the migrants arrived predominantly by sea and from very great distances; the earlier crises were more geographically concentrated in terms of both the countries of origin and the countries of destination; the motives for migration and the national (ethnic) composition of the migrants are far more complex and diverse now than

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they used to be; today's migrants target – in a far more conscious fashion than did their predecessors – the Western European countries with their stronger economies and higher living standards; several European countries at the forefront of events were subjected relatively rapidly and unexpectedly to substantial migration pressures (e.g. Italy, Greece, Hungary, Croatia). The rapid construction of European border barriers and the signing of migration agreements with Europe's neighbours (with Libya in earlier years, and more recently with Turkey) have very effectively influenced the direction and intensity of migration. The global and regional causes of Afro-Asian migration into Europe and the associated cumulative and multifaceted crises will not be resolved even in the medium term. Nor will the reasons for international migration cease to exist.

Keywords: migration, foreign, born population, allochthonous minorities, asylum seekers, refugees, Europe, Middle East, Africa