

Zsolt Gál:

Admire the best, forget the West - What kind of immigration policy for Central-Eastern Europe?

„The big difference in the way Europeans and Americans look at immigration springs from the fact that America protects its welfare system from immigrants but leaves its labour markets open, while the EU protects its labour markets and leaves its welfare system open.“

Kathleen Newland, Migration Policy Institute, Washington
(*The Economist: Talking of immigrants*, 3. June 2006)

“It’s just obvious that you can’t have free immigration and a welfare state.”

Milton Friedman, Nobel-prize laureate economist
(**Borjas, George J [2002]:** *The impact of welfare reform on immigrant welfare use*,
Center for Immigration Studies, Washington DC)

Most of the Western societies are ageing rapidly, the number of pensioners has been rising continuously in past decades. In the future we are facing even bigger rises in the number and share of old (65 +) population while the number of working age (15-64) population will rise only slowly or in many developed countries it is going to stagnate or decline. The old-age dependency ratio will rise in all OECD economies posing a critical challenge to public finances. Public pension expenditure as a percent of GDP has risen in the EU-15 from about 6% in 1960 to over 12% in 2000 and on the assumption that no action will be taken to address this situation, pension spending could reach unsustainable levels close to 20% of GDP in the coming decades (Mc Morrow – Werner [2002] p. 12). The ageing together with the fast improvement of the (mostly very expensive) medical technologies also leads to expanding health-care costs in public budgets. The replacement of the part of working age population through migration could help to reduce the financial burden of ageing. **The aim of this paper is to answer the question: is replacement migration a good solution for the new EU members to tackle the rising fiscal expenditure on pensions? Does it help to solve the financial consequences of ageing? If yes, what kind of models the CEE countries (notably Slovakia) should follow, what are the good and bad lessons from Western Europe and the USA? I will argue that during the last two decades in many Western countries the migration lead to more costs than benefits and created more problems than solved. Some EU members instead of using immigration as a tool to tackle the financial consequences of ageing, were creating their new ethnic underclass. We should learn from their mistakes and do not repeat them.**

Cost and benefits of migration for the host societies

Taking to account the relevance of the problem of migration in Western societies it is surprising that very few studies were made about its net fiscal balance. The existing cost-benefits analyses were exclusively made in the United States, while the studies about the economic consequences of migration are almost completely missing in the European Union.

In the 1990's U.S. Congress appointed a Commission on Immigration Reform, which requested the National Academy of Science to examine the overall fiscal impact of immigration. The results were contained in two studies by **Smith and Edmonston** (1997, 1998) and showed that net annual fiscal burden of immigration considering all transfers (from natives to immigrants) at (US) local and national levels is estimated to be between \$ 166 and \$ 226 per native household, so at the federal level the fiscal burden is between \$ 15 billion and \$ 21 billion per year in 1996 dollars (Borjas [2001] p. 126). The main reasons for this were found in the differences (between immigrant and native households) in family structure and income levels: immigrant families tend to have more dependent children who use publicly funded schools and immigrant households are poorer and so receive more welfare transfers and pay fewer taxes (Hanson et al. [2001] p. 59). The results – through the case studies of two states, California and New Jersey – showed great regional differences. Net annual fiscal impact imposed by current immigrant-headed households on native residents was \$ 299 in New Jersey and \$ 1174 in California, the average immigrant household receives transfers (from natives) of \$3,463 in California and \$1,484 in New Jersey (ibid. pp. 60, 121). These differences were explained by following factors: higher share of foreign born population in California, more extensive welfare system in the Golden State and different immigrant households there (poorer, less skilled with more dependent children).

George J. Borjas, a Harvard economist estimated that the overall economic impact (sum of fiscal, product, and labour market effects) of immigration in the United States is around a 10 billion net surplus annually (Borjas [2001] p. 87).

Steven A. Camarota from the Center for Immigration Studies, a Washington based think thank, estimated that households headed by illegal aliens imposed more than \$26.3 billion in costs on the (US) federal government in 2002 and paid only \$16 billion in taxes, creating a net fiscal deficit of almost \$10.4 billion, or \$2,700 per illegal household¹ (Camarota [2004] p. 5).

¹ The primary reason for this deficit according to Camarota was the low education levels (nearly two-thirds of illegal aliens lacking a high school degree) and resulting low incomes and tax payments of illegal immigrants, not their legal status, heavy use of most social services or unwillingness to work. Among the largest costs identified were: Medicaid (\$2.5 billion); treatment for the uninsured (\$2.2 billion); food assistance programs such as food stamps, WIC (Women Infants and Children program), and free school lunches (\$1.9 billion); the

The estimates showed that (short-term) fiscal balance of immigration on national level is rather marginal (around 0.1-0.2 % of the American GDP), but locally the costs for specific groups (California native taxpayers for example) can be relatively high. As the researchers found, the costs and benefits are strongly dependent on the composition of migrants (their employment status, earnings, skills, family sizes) and the welfare system arrangements. So any cost-benefit analyses should focus on these factors because they determine the amount of taxes and contributions paid by the migrants and the public expenditure related to them.

Replacement migration - yes, but not alone

Replacement migration can't solve alone the fiscal problems related to ageing. The worsening ratio between the legally employed (so contribution-paying) population and the (contribution financed) pensioners needs other measures to balance the pension and health-care expenditure:

- **Pension reform.** The parameters of the Pay-As-You-Go pension systems should be changed. Increasing the effective retirement age and decreasing the generosity of the public pension schemes (gross replacement rate) seems to be inevitable. The structure of the pension system could be transformed too. A self-funding mechanism could be added through the creation of "second pillar" public or private pension funds which are not directly dependent on the demographic change. The government could help and promote the activity of the already existing voluntary private pension funds. In this particular area some new EU members (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) with their pension reforms (creation of obligatory private pension funds) are ahead of most Western countries.
- **Labour market reform.** The public policies should help to raise the employment. In many European countries just 55-60 % of the working age (15-64) population is (legally) employed. This is particularly the case of some new EU members (notably Hungary, Poland, Slovakia). High unemployment, inactivity or early retirement rates are reducing the number of contribution-payers. There are vast resources of possible contribution-payers within these countries, so the policies should be targeted to promote the job-creation. If great variety of jobs is created for different groups of people (even for those over 65), the financial burden of ageing will be lowered.

federal prison and court systems (\$1.6 billion); and federal aid to schools (\$1.4 billion). Many of these costs associated with illegals are due to their American-born children, who are awarded U.S. citizenship at birth. That's why Camarota argued that greater efforts at barring illegals from federal programs will not reduce costs because their citizen children can continue to access them. See: **Camarota, Steven A [2004]: *The High Cost of Cheap Labor, Illegal Immigration and the Federal Budget***

Migration added to reforms mentioned above could be useful in the partial replacement of working age population. It is important to note that none of these measures could solve the ageing-related problems alone. According to a 2004 IMF study the changes in just one area would require very dramatic reforms between 2000 and 2050: raising the retirement age by 6-8 years, enlarging the employment rate by 10-20 percentage points or admitting so many migrants that they share on total population will increase to 20-40 % (International Monetary Fund [2004] p. 155). These measures are hardly politically acceptable, so their combination could be a feasible solution. Therefore replacement migration could be one of the measures needed to tackle the financial consequences of ageing. However it's important to note that its effectiveness is strongly dependent on various factors analysed below.

To what kind of labour market the migrants arrive?

Replacement migration makes sense only when migrants find a job. In countries with low employment and high unemployment rates with stagnating or slowly rising employment levels mass migration will only deepen not solve the problems of the labour market. In April 2006 the average unemployment rate in the US was 4,7 %, the largest ethnic minority immigrant groups had similar indicators: the unemployment rate among Hispanics was 5,4 % and from the Asian working age population 3,6 % was jobless (US Department of Labor – Bureau of Labor Statistics [2006] p. 1-2). The labour market performance is also very similar in most of the European Union's member states if we compare the native workforce with the migrants from other EU countries. However, there are huge differences between the EU and third country nationals. In 2004 in the 15 countries of the European Union the average unemployment rate among EU citizens was 8.7 % for females and 7.5 % for males while among third country nationals the corresponding figures were 17,9 and 17.3 % (European Commission – DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities [2005] p. 126). So the unemployment rate among the recent immigrants from third countries (foreign nationals born outside the EU) is more than twice the rate of EU citizen's.

There are great differences between the different ethnic groups even in the United Kingdom, one of the best performing European economy in last decade. The unemployment rate for white British man stayed at 6 % in 2001 and 4 % of white British women were jobless in the same period (Office for National Statistics [2006] p. 134). But the unemployment rate for Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black man varied between 16 and 21 % and 18 % of Pakistani and 22 % of Bangladeshi women were without jobs - this is around five times more than the rate for native white British females (ibid.). While around 68 % of the working age British women

were employed, only 24 and 20 % of Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim woman were so (ibid. p. 150). It is necessary to emphasise that these results reflect the improvement of the labour market performance of ethnic minorities in Britain during the 1991-2001 period of economic boom. The other alarming fact is that the situation of the second generation immigrants (children of immigrants who were born abroad) is worsening in many European countries. In France for example the unemployment rate of the 19-29 years old children of Algerian and Moroccan immigrants is 40 %, twice the national youth unemployment rate and lot higher than their parents (INSEE [2005] p. 130). Under these circumstances one can hardly talk about beneficial replacement migration, many times rather the immigration of welfare recipients is the case.

The US and some European countries (Britain, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden) have high employment and low unemployment rates. America, Britain, Ireland, Netherlands and Spain had dynamic labour markets in last 15 years with many new jobs created. On the other hand many countries of the old continent were coping with low economic growth, high, mainly structural unemployment (around 10 %) and stagnating employment rates. The three largest economies of the Euro Zone, Germany, France and Italy are the most important examples, but Belgium, Greece and some new member states have similar problems.

The sluggish economic growth, stagnating low employment rates and high, long-term structural unemployment in the big continental economies were caused by the following factors²:

- Rigid, over-regulated labour markets (strong employment protection, low flexibility in hiring and firing, high costs of firing) caused by legislation, case law and collective agreements.
- High tax wedge on labour cost (high personal income tax and social security contributions which are increasing the labour cost for employer).
- Too high welfare benefits, especially high unemployment benefits offered for long term without active participation of the unemployed.
- Demographic change, namely the ageing of the population, which puts under pressure the pension and health-care expenditure and many time leads to rises in already high contributions. The European populations are “greyer” than the American.

² See: Aiginger – Guger [2005], OECD [2004/a] and OECD [2004/b], European Commission [2006] and European Commission [2004]. In the post-socialist new member states of the EU the low employment and high unemployment rates are the consequences of other factors, notably the economic heritage of the communist system and the following deep transformation recession.

- Social and cultural differences (preference of free time over work, low entrepreneurship activity, low labour mobility – both job to job and geographical mobility).

So the CEE countries should try to avoid these problems by different labour market policies. To boost the job creation it's necessary to liberalise the labour markets, cut the high taxes and social contributions as well as the welfare benefits and prefer the active labour market policies instead of passively distributing the benefits. Without these steps the businesses are not motivated to create new (legal) jobs and the unemployed or inactive people are not motivated to look actively after a job. Mass immigration to these unreformed labour markets just deepens the economic problems.

What kind of migrants are arriving?

The aim of the replacement migration is to gain job-takers who will contribute to the public budgets and doing so they will help to reduce the financial burden of ageing. That's why the replacement migration should be predominantly a migration of workers based upon the demand of the labour markets. Asylum seekers, family reunification and illegal migration are not predominantly driven by labour demand, these migrants many times lack the skills needed to find a job. Replacement is the most widespread argument supporting migration but in reality in most of the developed countries only the minority of the new migrants were workers during the last 15 years. Most of the Western European countries had high level of migration of refugees and their family members and relatives but with the exemption of the UK, Ireland and Sweden they didn't opened their labour markets for the citizens of new member states after the 2004 enlargement of the European Union. They used temporary restrictions to keep out the workers from new member states.

Table no. 1. COMPOSITION OF IMMIGRANT OR LONG-TERM MIGRANT ADMISSIONS BY CATEGORY, SELECTED DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Receiving country	Workers		Family reunification		Refugees	
	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001
Australia	45	55	47	33	8	12
Canada	18	26	64	62	18	12
United States	10	19	75	70	15	11
Denmark	20	22	60	53	20	25
France	27	20	58	69	15	11
Sweden	2	2	62	65	36	33
Switzerland	47	55	51	42	2	3
United Kingdom	49	54	42	35	9	11

Source: **International Organisation for Migration [2005]:** World Migration 2005, Costs and Benefits of International Migration, p. 400

The CEE countries should focus on immigration of skilled workers in connection with the demands of their labour market.

Social and cultural background of the migrants is also very important. The level of their education, language skills, the cultural traditions, family models, the level of corruption and crime in sending societies etc. These factors should be also taken to account. During the last decades the differences between the education and skills of immigrants and native population in the US has been widening (see Borjas [2001], Camarota [2001] or Hanson et al. [2001]). In 2000 only 8 % of the native US workforce had less than high school education but more than 29.8 % of immigrants (foreign born) and among the immigrants who arrived in the 1990's their share was 34,4 % (Camarota [2001] p. 9). In the European Union there are similar gaps between the education of natives and third country immigrants.

Extensive or limited welfare states?

The extent of the welfare state as well as the accessibility of the welfare benefits for the migrants is another key factor. An extensive welfare state with wide-scale benefits (not just the social benefits but free - tax financed - education and healthcare too) accessible for migrants could lead to a situation when the cost of migration outnumber the benefits. When high proportion of migrants lives on various welfare benefits or works for low wages (so pays small taxes and contributions) this could be the case. This problem is strongly connected with the level of education of migrants. Low skilled people tend to be unemployed more often in Western societies and if they work, they earn lower wages, so pay smaller amounts of taxes.

In the United States the welfare participation of immigrants is higher than the average even though the access of migrants (especially the illegal aliens) to various social benefits is limited. In 2000 19.7 % of the immigrants households and 13.3 % of the native households used some type of means tested welfare assistance program (Camarota [2001] p. 12). In Europe the differences in welfare dependence are even bigger for various reasons: the unemployment and inactivity rates of extra EU migrants and their descendants are higher, the access to welfare benefits for migrants is barely limited and the welfare systems are more extensive than in the US. America is the only developed country that does not have a full government-supported health-care system, the only Western democracy that does not provide child support to all families and one of the only two OECD countries (the other is Australia) that does not provide paid maternity leave (Miklethwait - Wooldridge [2005] p. 7).

The CEE countries should try to avoid the building of extensive welfare states or they could limit the access of immigrants to some welfare benefits.

When the replacement migration pays off?

Summarising the factors mentioned above, we can analyse the fiscal impact of the migration:

Table no. 2. Cost-benefit analysis of the migration

Criteria	The benefits of immigration outnumber costs, migration is beneficial for the economy and helps to reduce the fiscal burden caused by ageing	The costs of immigration outnumber its benefits, migration is harmful for the economy and deepens the fiscal burden caused by ageing
State of the labour market	high employment and low unemployment rates	low employment and high unemployment rates
Dynamics of the labour market	Rising employment, declining unemployment	Stagnating, slowly rising or falling employment, rising or high, stagnating unemployment
Welfare state extension	Limited welfare system	Extensive welfare system
Accessibility of welfare benefits for migrants	The access of migrants to welfare benefits is limited	Migrants are entitled to full scale of welfare benefits
Composition of migrants	Most of the migrants are workers or their family members	Most of the migrants are refugees, asylum seekers and their family members
Level of education	Most of the migrants have higher education (high school or more) and good language skills	Most of the migrants are low skilled with poor knowledge of the official language
Crime in immigrant communities	Migrants are underrepresented in crime as well as in prison population	Migrants are over-represented in crime as well as in prison population

Analysing the migration to the EU and USA during the last 15 years under these criteria the overall picture is quite gloomy. Many of the West European countries with extensive welfare states and badly performing labour markets had high levels of migration (predominantly low skilled refugees and their families) from the developing countries. The result in many cases: the unemployment of third country migrants is 2 or 3 times the national average, their employment rate is 10-30 percentage points below the majority population's and they're often over-represented in crime. This kind of migration means a net financial burden for the host countries and it deepens the negative fiscal consequences of ageing. This development is in sharp contrast with the predominantly labour migration in Germany and France during the years of post-war economic miracles (1945 - 1973) or the internal migration within the EU. As the study made by the Bank of England showed, the migration from the new EU member states to Britain after the 2004 accession was also beneficial, helped to reduce inflation and didn't harm the work opportunities or the wage levels of native workers significantly (Blanchflower et al. [2007]). The main reasons for this: the vast majority of the migrants are young (under 35) workers with qualification, mostly without dependent children, their access

to welfare benefits was limited (only after 12 months of continuous employment they can have access to the full range of benefits), their welfare use minimal, employment and unemployment rates similar to the native population. However this British experience is rather the exemption in West European immigration policies in last two decades. Most of the EU-15 countries closed their labour markets for the workforce from new member states instead of limiting the access of migrants to welfare benefits and selecting them upon the demand of the economy.

The overall situation in America is much better. The employment and unemployment rates of migrants are similar to the US average. The welfare system is smaller and the access of migrants to it is limited. However there are great internal differences within the huge country. California, the state with one of the most generous welfare systems in USA (with its services and benefits mostly accessible to migrants) saw huge immigration in last decades (mostly low skilled illegal migrants from Latin America). On the other hand there was an exodus of over 1 million people from the higher middle classes (mainly from Los Angeles's Orange county) to the neighbouring Rocky Mountain states with lower taxes. As a combination of rising welfare cost (because of mass migration) and diminishing tax base (emigration of richer taxpayers) the golden state nearly went to bankruptcy. Some other states with similar levels of migration but modest welfare systems (Arizona, Texas) had no such financial troubles.

The CEE countries upon the criteria mentioned above and avoiding the mistakes made by many Western governments can develop complex beneficial migration policies. Even when migration leads to net financial gains other than economic aspects should be also studied.

Economic benefit shouldn't be the only aspect considered

When millions of migrants, future inhabitants and citizens are at stake, other than economic consequences should be also considered. The impact of mass migration on host societies, security and political dimensions are very important. Migration waves to Western countries led to serious problems in these areas. The main concerns are the following:

- **The lack of democratic legitimacy for mass migration**

In most of the countries the majority of people was against great migration, so the immigration was running without the support of the Western citizens or against they will.³ It lead to a rise of anti-immigrant parties, some of them extremist political movements (e.g. the Front National in France). If further mass migration continues it could lead to the serious

³ See for example the 1997 Eurobarometer opinion poll: **European Commission [1997]: Racism and Xenophobia in Europe**, Eurobarometer Opinion Poll No. 47.

destabilisation of democratic party systems. The CEE countries with the lowest rates of immigrant population have the strongest anti-immigration attitudes in the EU.

- **The lack of integration policies**

The mass migration to the West was running without any integration or/and assimilation policies. Segregated ethnic ghettos were born, mainly in or around the big European cities. In these parallel societies with own shops, clubs, churches, mostly segregated schools the migrants and their children live isolated from the majority. With higher unemployment, crime and social problems, many times also ethnic tensions these migrant parallel societies became the symbols of urban poverty. European countries instead of using migration to reduce fiscal problems caused by ageing were creating their ethnic underclass. Migration from completely different societies also brought to the Western countries many problematic traditions (polygamy, female genital mutilation, honour killings).

- **The risk of radicalism and terrorism**

Migration also lead to rising Islamic radicalism and home grown terrorism, they are both a great threat for Western democracies. Within the majority population extreme racist and neo-fascist groups continue to prevail.

Future mass migration can deepen these problems if no adequate integration policies are created and implemented. In a worst-case scenario some European countries could fall apart to ethnic enclaves if nothing is changed. The CEE countries should try to avoid this problems with adequate integration policies which are implemented (so they do not exist only in declarative level).

Main findings:

Replacement migration together with other measures (pension and labor market reforms) can be a feasible measure to tackle the rising fiscal expenditure on pensions. However its effectiveness is strongly dependent on the economic situation of host countries, the extension and accessibility of welfare states and the composition and skills of migrants. Other than economic factors (notably security risks and integration problems) also should be considered.

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