

Immigration: the position of eurASP

An honest constructive dialog around immigration is today as important as it is difficult. It is important because migratory flows – which have always existed in history – today have reached an unprecedented scale, deeply affecting demography, environment and societies.

It is difficult because immigration is a sensitive and highly polarized topic: on the one hand, the populist defenders of cultural identity stand up for immigration controls based on ethnic and cultural criteria; on the other hand, the advocates for an unconditional acceptance of all immigrants stifle any criticism with accusations of racism or “ecofascism”.

In such an intoxicated climate, we in eurASP distance ourselves from both sides. We fully recognize the right of migrating but we also recognize the risks of an excessive and uncontrolled immigration. We recognize the duty of Europe to help developing countries but we believe that welcoming immigrants is neither an effective way to help them nor a way to solve the long-term problems at the root of migratory flows.

1. Immigration is not a solution for the countries where immigrants come from.

Of all the people born in developing countries, only a very small percentage is able to emigrate elsewhere (Cafaro 2019). By welcoming immigrants, we can hence help only a tiny fraction of people from developing countries and, most of the times, such a tiny fraction does not represent people who need it most: many immigrants are relatively privileged, rich and better-educated people.

Their skills would be much more needed in their own countries. Developing nations cannot afford to train doctors and nurses who leave for better paying jobs in wealthier countries (Tulenko 2010). This clearly indicates that welcoming immigrants not only does not solve the problems driving migration but may also exacerbate them.

More and better targeted aid in developing countries will be a much more effective help, also alleviating the often-traumatic necessity for people to leave their homes. Providing universal contraception is one of the most effective forms of aid in terms of social, economic and environmental benefit for the origin country (Lomborg 2018).

2. Immigration is not a solution for the countries where immigrants come to.

Many people are concerned about the economic consequences of low fertility and ageing population in Europe and see immigrants as a tool to fill the expected shortage of workers. But accommodating ever-more people to sustain an ever-growing society is not a solution: it is just a delusional temporary fix, which fuels a Ponzi scheme that is clearly not sustainable in the medium/long term.

On the contrary, immigration may exacerbate actual problems that many European countries are facing today, such as shortage of resources (especially energy and water) and excess of unemployed. Accepting more immigrants than can integrate creates social conflicts, whose first victims are often the immigrants themselves. Vice versa, limiting the number could facilitate their integration.

It is worth noticing that the concerns about population decline and its economic implications are not supported by evidence. Indeed, the poorest countries of the world are not countries with shrinking populations but, on the contrary, are all countries with high fertility and rapid population growth with the only exception of North Korea (source: World Bank). Vice versa, Japan is still one the wealthiest and most innovative countries in the world although its population has been ageing and shrinking for more than 20 years.

3. Immigration undermines environmental sustainability

Europe is a high densely populated continent and is currently in an ecological overshoot, since its ecological footprint exceeds its biocapacity (source: GFN). While some people argue that the only driver for environmental impact is over-consumption, IPCC reports recognize population growth as one of the main drivers of the global increase in greenhouse gas emissions (IPCC 2022). Other environmental impacts, such as water withdrawals from rivers, conversion of wildlands to crop lands and biodiversity losses, are even more affected by population growth. According to the anthropologist McKee, human population density of continental countries explains 88% of the variation in the proportion of their bird and mammal species threatened with extinction. In the last three decades, rich countries reduced on average their per capita emissions but failed to reduce their total emissions, which shows that even a relatively small population growth can nullify the effect of a reduction in individual impacts (Tamburino 2023).

All this clearly indicates that it is hard to achieve environmental sustainability if population keeps growing.

The main driver for population growth in Europe is currently immigration. It would be hence important to limit immigration and set it at levels that allow for population contraction. Combined with a reduction in per capita consumption, this would make it easier to reduce our environmental impacts, share our land with nature and wildlife (Navarro 2014) and mitigate climate change. This would be beneficial for everybody not only in Europe but also and especially in poorer countries, where many immigrants come from and which are often the most vulnerable to climate change.

Conclusion

Anti-immigration positions are usually equated to racism. It is time to break such a dangerous equation. There are reasons to support immigration that are anything but humanitarian: many people want immigrants just to exploit them and see them as an opportunity of cheap labour. Vice versa, there are reasons to support lowering immigration that are anything but racist: good, environmental and humanitarian reasons.

It is time to raise awareness of this so that we can concentrate on the root of the problem instead of its symptoms.

References

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