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forum



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Heft 21

Thilo Lang (Hrsg.)

Return Migration in Central Europe: Current trends and an analysis of policies supporting returning migrants

The following contents refer to studies which were established in the framework of the Re-Turn Project. The Re-Turn Project is implemented through the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme Co-financed by ERDF (European Regional Development Fund).



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1 Introduction

Thilo Lang, Zoltán Kovács, Lajos Boros, Gábor Hegedűs, Gábor Lados

After 1989 Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has gone through important political, economic and social changes. The entry of many CEE countries to the European Union during the first decade of the 21st century enhances the European integration. Joining the EU accelerated economic growth of these countries and opened work migration flows, mainly from Central Europe to North-Western Europe. Economically motivated migration of in particular young and well educated people from the New Member States to high-income countries is currently dominating international migration flows in Europe thanks to the free right to work in any other EU Member State (DRBOHLAV et al. 2009; MARTIN & RADU 2011).

This process generates new challenges in territorial development. On the one hand, the ratio of foreigners dramatically increased in some of the core regions; on the other hand, regions affected by emigration faced serious demographic consequences. Migration, both extra-European and intra-European, has a significant impact on the demographic and labour force development of regions. Advanced regions normally benefit from migration, whereas poorer regions suffer from it. In addition to its impact on the labour market, migration reduces ageing in affluent regions and increases it in poor ones (ESPON 2010a). In this respect we can identify core regions and crisis regions of migration within Europe.

Figure 1 shows population change in Europe for the period of 2000-2007, combined with data on natural change and balance of migration. Regions are classified in six groups according to their demographic profile and migration balance. Based on the ESPON-analysis, regions gaining or losing population through migration can be delimited. One of the most striking dividing lines on the map is running between Eastern and Western Europe. Regions suffering from emigration are located mainly in the former state-socialist countries, including Eastern Germany. Ten out of fifteen EU regions suffering most intensely from out-migration are located in Eastern Central Europe. If we add the three East German regions then the thirteen most seriously hit regions are in the post-socialist countries. In addition to post-socialist countries, southern parts of Mediterranean countries (Greece, Italy) and remote sparsely populated regions of Scandinavian countries lying beyond the Arctic Circle are suffering from emigration. Beside these extensive areas, smaller regions in the core of Europe (e.g. Central France, Northern England) are also hit hard by emigration. They can be commonly characterised as “internal peripheries”.

In the EU15 almost all regions, except those in north-eastern France, northern Portugal, north-eastern Finland and some regions in the former East Germany profit from migration. The most profound gains were recorded in Italy north of Naples, south-western France, some south-western regions of Spain and in Algarve, all forming a broad Mediterranean crescent, and in east and south-west England (ESPON 2010a).

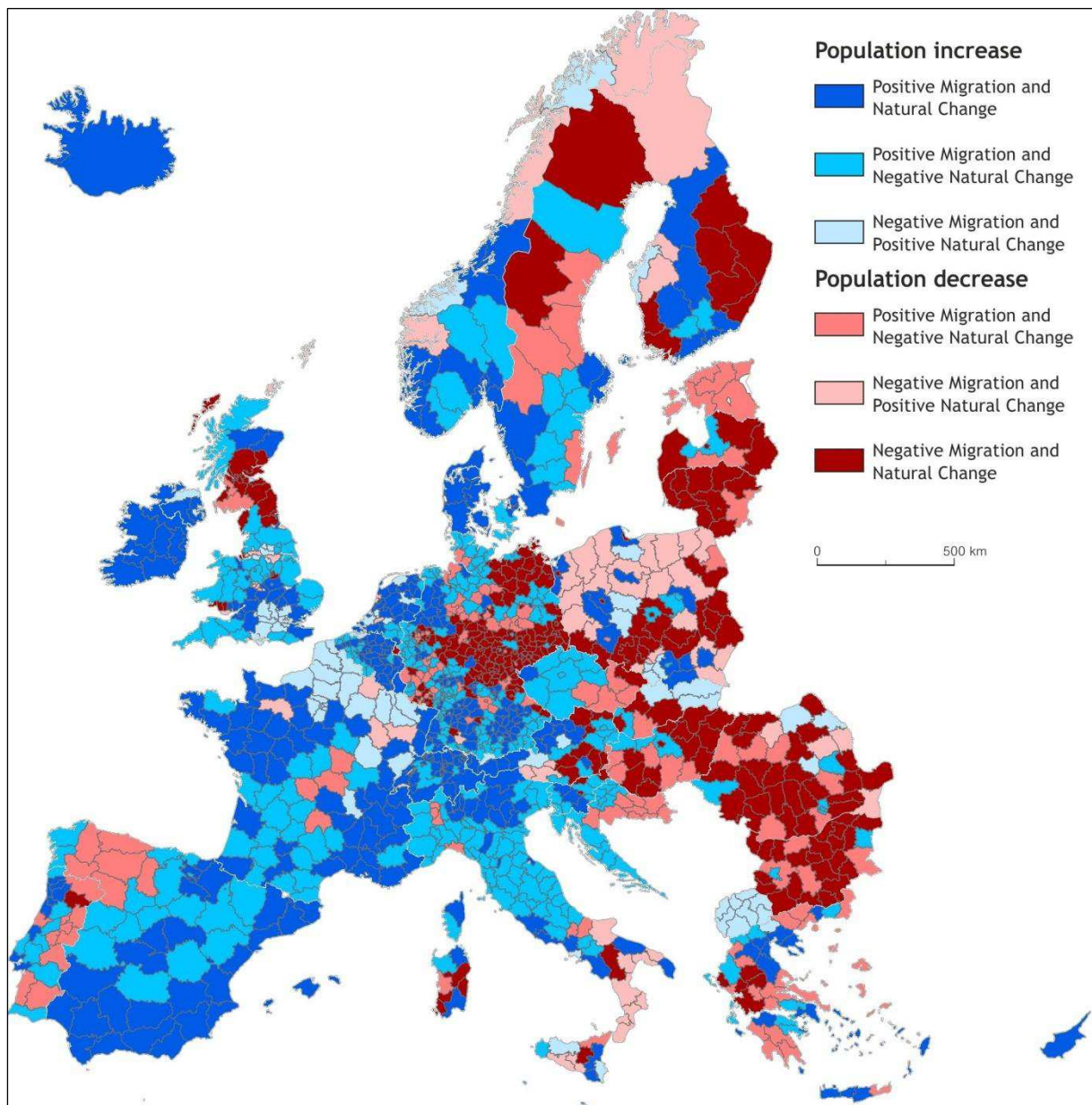


Fig. 1: Population Change by Main Components 2000-2007, NUTS3 level (for colour illustration see <http://www.ifl-leipzig.de/de/publikationen/zeitschriften-und-reihen/forum-ifl.html>)

Source: ESPON 2010b, p. 15

At the regional scale, population change through migration is caused by two different components: internal migration between regions within individual countries and international migration to and from different countries. To fine-tune the picture both components should be taken into consideration when analysing the migration record of regions within Europe. As figure 2 shows in about 64 % of EU regions the total migration balance was positive for the period of 2005-2010. The combination of positive internal and positive international migration occurred in many cases (42 %), which was followed by the combination of negative internal and positive external migration (19 %). Conversely, there are hardly any regions with positive internal migration and negative external migration. Regions where both components are negative (13 %) can mainly be found outside the largest metropolitan regions and geographically mostly in the eastern part of Europe (ESPON 2010c).

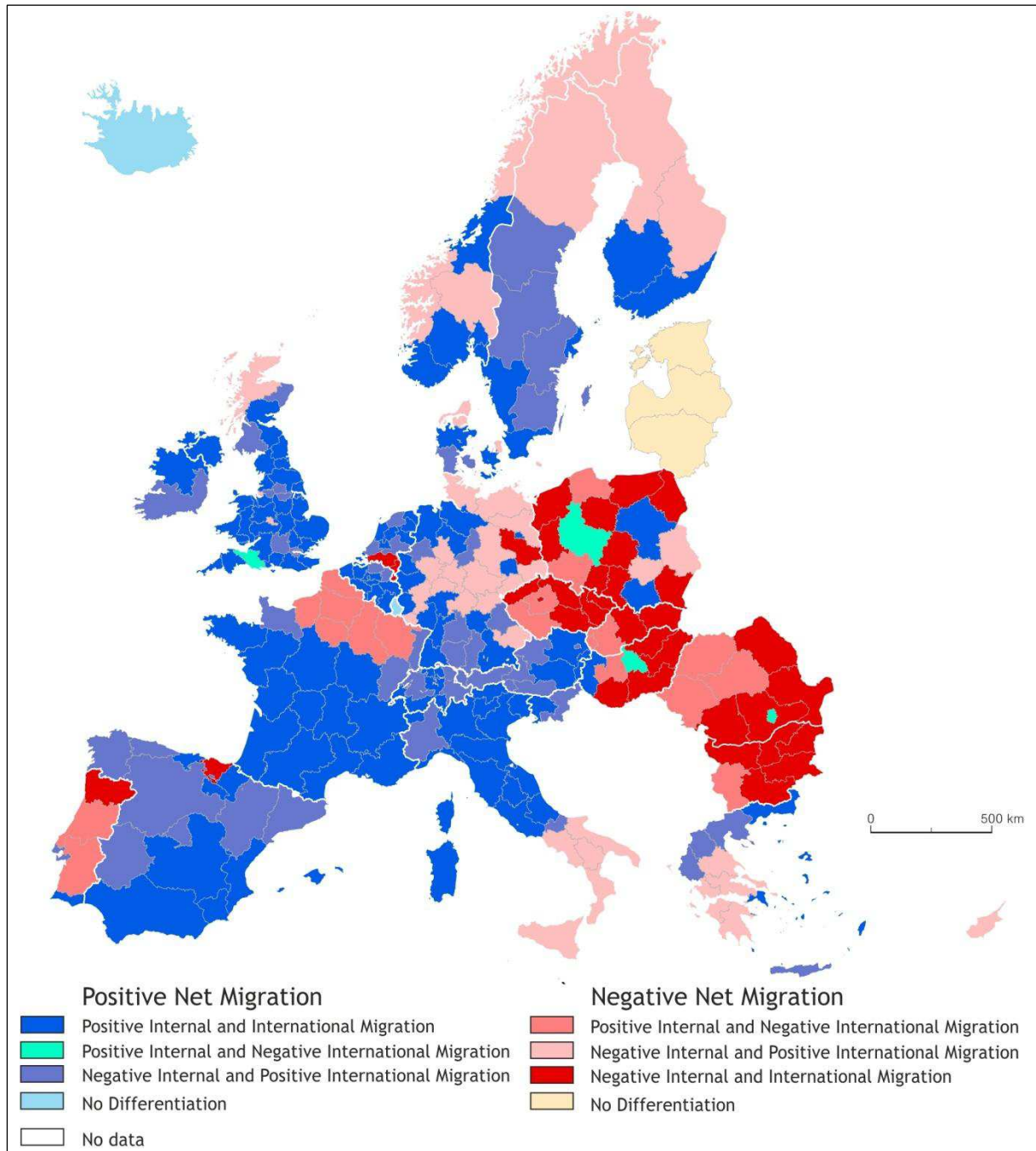


Fig. 2: Net Migration: Internal and international migration balance in 2005-2010, NUTS2 level (for colour illustration see <http://www.ifl-leipzig.de/de/publikationen/zeitschriften-und-reihen/forum-ifl.html>)

Source: ESPON 2010c, p. 3

Considering the dimensions, East German and Bulgarian regions suffered most from population decline caused by migration, whereas regions of Ireland and Southern Spain gained the greatest numbers of immigrants in relative terms between 2000 and 2007. Except for some of the capital cities' and regional centres' regions, the overwhelming majority of regions in the former state-socialist countries suffered from emigration. It also seems to be a common trend that population losses caused simultaneously by national and international migration tend to overlap in the

eastern regions of these countries. Migration loss of regions in the EU15 is normally caused by internal migration only (e.g. northern Scandinavia, northern Scotland, eastern Germany, southern Italy and Greece). Negative balance of international migration plays a role only in Portugal and northern France.

According to estimations the annual turnover of migration is around 2 million in the ESPON countries. Migration flows between European countries go mainly from East to West. This pattern becomes clear from figure 3 where migration flows involving more than 5,000 people in the years of 2006 and 2007 are indicated. There were altogether 79 such relations within Europe in these two years. The greatest flows were recorded between Germany and Poland (223,000) and between Spain and Romania (102,000). Migration between Romania and Italy (76,000) and between Spain/Poland and the UK (52,000) were also considerable. The map indicates that migration flows favour mainly major European metropolitan regions, like London, Madrid and Paris, but other capital city regions also attract large number of international migrants (ESPON 2010d).

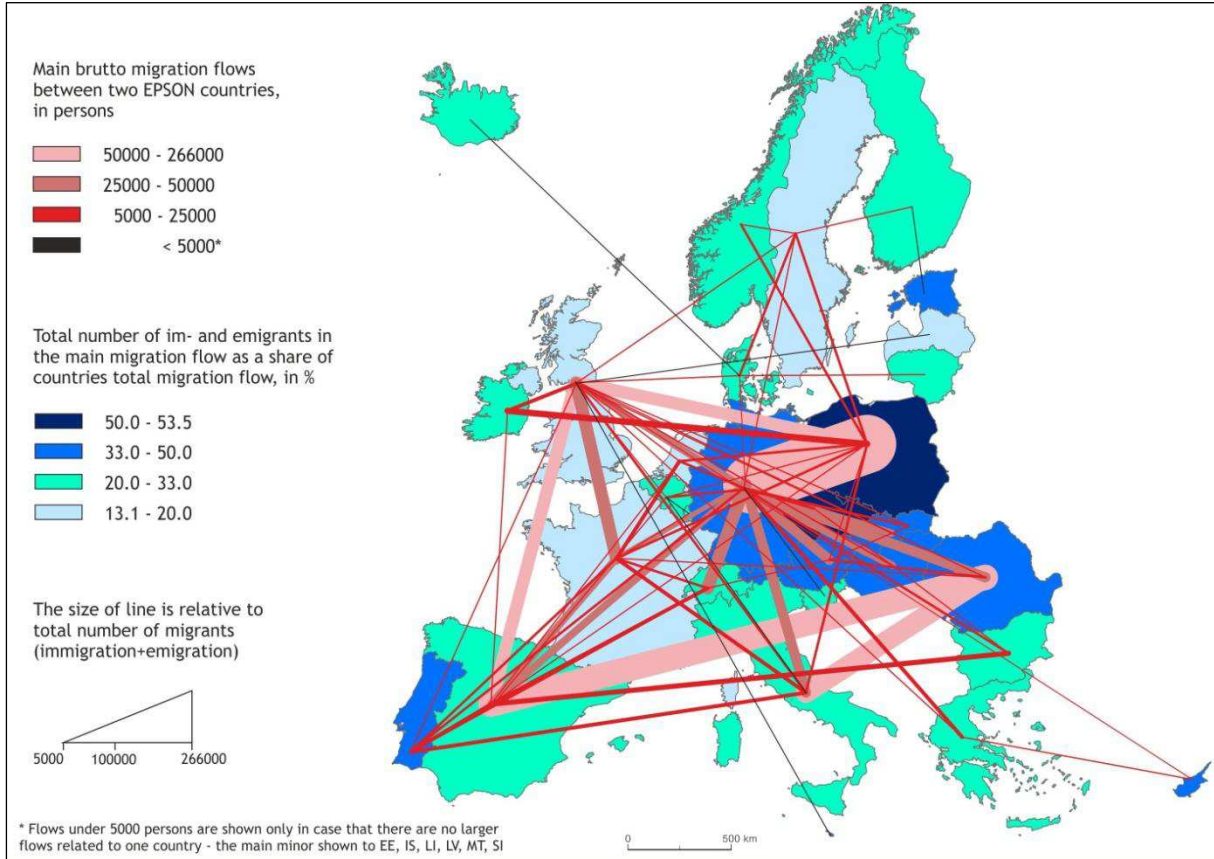


Fig. 3: Main bilateral gross migration flows (for colour illustration see <http://www.ifl-leipzig.de/de/publikationen/zeitschriften-und-reihen/forum-ifl.html>)

Source: ESPON 2010b, p. 49

Considering internal migration flows involving more than 2,500 persons the advantageous position of major metropolis regions becomes even clearer. There were 658 such connections in Europe in 2007, and the greatest ones were directed to the most important global cities of Europe including London, Paris or Madrid, and cities of the Ruhr agglomeration. Regional disparities in economic development and income level within countries appear also strikingly on

the map. Migration flows inside Sweden directed predominantly from north to south, in Germany from east to west, in other countries (e.g. GREECE, Hungary) from the less developed peripheries to the core (capital) regions.

As we have seen emigration is a serious problem for many rural regions especially in CEE-countries. But the migration process is not only a one-way and irreversible phenomenon (GMELCH 1980, CASSARINO 2004, SILLS 2008). In this context the issue remigration gained relevance in the past years. Empirical studies show the willingness of many people to come back to their countries. However, this process is often associated with significant problems of reintegration. Often the home regions neglect the returning migrants' contribution to regional economic development of these countries, and they do not support migrants in their return. It is estimated, that up to 50 % of these outmigrants would return to their home countries within 5 years after emigration – a huge potential for regional development as these people gained new social, cultural and professional competencies while being abroad. This is where the project “Re-Turn: Regions benefitting from returning migrants” takes its starting point. Re-Turn's main objectives are linked to the development and implementation of services needed to support migrants in their wish to return, the promotion of returning migrants as a human capital resource for innovative business development, the creation of framework conditions for reintegration into their home countries' labour markets and social communities. The project aims at developing, testing and implementing joint strategies, new support policies, tools and services in the participating regions. With this volume of forum ifl, we present two studies which were established in the framework of the Re-Turn project: *A Comparative Report on Re-Migration Trends in Central Europe* (chapter 2) and a study about support policies: *Returning People to the Homeland: Tools and Methods Supporting Remigrants in a European Context* (chapter 3). Both studies help to shed light on a number of open research questions around the issue of return migration.

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