



Workforce Mobility in Eastern Europe: Dynamics and Economic Impact

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the dynamics of workforce mobility in Eastern Europe and its economic impact on both origin and destination countries. It examines the key drivers of migration, such as wage disparities, labor market demands, and economic development, with a focus on the role of migration networks and remittances. The analysis highlights how labor migration from Eastern Europe has contributed to economic growth in both sending and receiving countries by addressing labor shortages, boosting entrepreneurship, and enhancing skill acquisition. However, it also addresses the challenges, including brain drain, dependency on remittances, and the impact on local labor markets. Additionally, the paper discusses the evolving role of Eastern European countries as both sources and destinations for migration, driven by foreign investments and internal economic development. Finally, the study assesses the broader social, political, and economic implications of workforce mobility in the region, offering insights into future migration trends and policy considerations.

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1. Introduction the Conceptual Framework and Theories of Migration

1.1. Migration as a Social Phenomenon and Process

Migration is defined as human mobility involving the crossing of borders and establishing residence in a different area. It can also be described as the movement of individuals or groups across administrative or political boundaries to settle temporarily or permanently in another location.

This concept is interdisciplinary, involving fields such as sociology, economics, law, political science, demography, and psychology. Migration can be seen as an event, a phenomenon, or a process. It is described as a sociodemographic event, with the process referring to its consequences and changes.

As a complex demographic phenomenon, migration carries significant social, economic, and political implications, making it essential for informing development policies. Internal migration refers to movement within a country's borders, while external migration involves crossing national borders, typically from less affluent to more affluent countries. Emigration involves leaving a locality or country, while immigration refers to arriving in a new one, often for reasons related to employment, education, or family reunification.

Integration is understood as a bidirectional process of active participation and acceptance within a society. Analyzing migration involves considering the actors, context, intensity, and duration of the process, from both the origin and destination countries' perspectives. Actors include individuals and groups with diverse characteristics, moving to settle elsewhere.

The context includes factors that trigger migration from the country of origin, such as unemployment or poverty, and supportive factors in the destination country, such as better job opportunities. The duration of migration can vary, being short, medium, or long-term.

1.2. Motivations for Migration

Migration is driven by a variety of motivations. According to classical theories, these motivations can be divided into two categories: push factors (armed conflicts, ethnic discrimination, natural disasters, unfavorable economic conditions, lack of professional opportunities, etc.) and pull factors (higher salaries, better living conditions, better working conditions, opportunities for youth and entrepreneurs, etc.).

Most models analyzing the decision to migrate suggest that people are primarily motivated by the desire to maximize their standard of living and future earnings by moving permanently to the destination country. The economic model posits that individuals calculate potential lifetime earnings in the destination

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country. Another significant motivation is earning higher incomes to send remittances or save for the future. According to the new economics of labor migration model, migrants aim to resolve their family's economic difficulties before potentially returning home.

The push-pull model, developed by the International Organization for Migration, identifies five pull factors (better living conditions, higher salaries, experiences of other migrants, better job prospects, individual freedom) and two push factors (ethnic issues, economic conditions) specific to destination countries. Differences in regional opportunities currently determine migration volumes and directions, influenced by economic, living standards, social welfare, cultural, and political differences.

Several factors influence migration, including migration chains and networks, family and community influence, life cycle position, the migration industry, policy structures of opportunity, migrant agency, structural dependency on emigration, and structural dependency on immigration. Migration networks play a crucial role by supporting the decision to migrate and forming migrant communities in destination countries. Migration is often driven by family decisions rather than just individual choices. Economic migration often results in higher incomes and extended stays, which can lead to family reunification and potential permanent migration. The migration industry, which includes labor recruitment agencies, significantly facilitates the migration process. Migrants actively seek better outcomes for themselves and their families, with their decisions being influenced by the policies—whether flexible or restrictive—of destination countries. Additionally, some states rely on emigration for employment growth and reducing unemployment, while others depend on immigrant labor despite high domestic unemployment.

1.3. Stages in the Evolution of Migration

Migration has been a continuous phenomenon throughout history, driven by various economic, social, political, and environmental conditions. A notable pattern is the migration from the Global South to the Global North and from East to West, often from less developed or developing countries to more developed ones.

Jean-Pierre Garson and Anais Loizillon identify four key stages in Europe's migration evolution post-1950:

1. Migration for Work and Reconstruction (1945-1975): This period, termed "the thirty glorious years," was marked by labor migration within Europe to address shortages in post-war reconstruction. Migrants from Southern European countries like Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Italy, as well as Ireland, moved to Western European states. Concurrently, migrants from North Africa, Turkey, and the former Yugoslavia moved to the UK. Following the establishment of the European Economic Community in 1957, intra-community migration increased, with Italians moving to other member states. Despite this, significant migration from third countries to developed European states continued, with over 30 million foreign workers in this period.

2. Economic Crisis and New Migration Waves (1970s-1980s): The mid-1970s economic crisis led many European countries to restrict labor migration. Nevertheless, other forms of migration persisted, including family reunification and asylum seeking.

3. Diversification of Destination and Origin Countries (1980s-1990s): This era saw an increase in both destination and origin countries. States previously considered source countries, such as Spain, Italy, Ireland, Greece, and Portugal, became host countries. Political changes in Central and Eastern Europe and regional conflicts led to increased migration for family reunification and labor. Highly skilled migrants were attracted to developed countries, while ethnic minorities from the East moved to Western countries like Germany, Greece, and Finland.

4. Work Migration and the Preference for Skilled and Temporary Workers (Post-1990s): The period after the 1990s saw a rise in both permanent and temporary work migration, especially in sectors requiring low or high qualifications (e.g., healthcare, IT, education). There was also increased demand for unskilled labor in agriculture, construction, and domestic care.

2. Migratory Dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe

2.1. Quantifying the Economic Impact of the Loss of Skilled Labor

Member states in Central and Eastern Europe have the most mobile populations. Citizens of these countries have primarily moved west, including to Italy and Spain. The eastern expansions of the European Union in 2004 (10 countries), 2007 (Bulgaria and Romania), and 2013 (Croatia) increased the potential for east-west mobility within the EU, considering that labor mobility is one of the fundamental freedoms of the EU.

However, the accession treaties with the new EU member states allowed older countries to impose transition periods of up to seven years, during which immigration restrictions for citizens of the new member states could be maintained.

Older member countries also had the option to introduce such controls during the seven-year transition period, even if they had lifted the restrictions earlier, provided there was a serious disruption to labor markets.

In 2004, twelve of the fifteen older EU members used this option and adopted temporary immigration controls, but the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Sweden opened their labor markets directly from May 1, 2004, for nationals of the eight Central European countries (EU8) that joined the EU on May 1, 2004.

When Bulgaria and Romania joined, ten countries had already opened their labor markets from 2007, while the other fifteen countries imposed restrictions on free movement (usually requiring a work permit). These temporary restrictions were gradually eliminated during the seven-year transition periods. It is noteworthy that, among all the older EU members, there was only one case of new restrictions being introduced after a complete removal of restrictions: Spain introduced new controls on immigrants from Romania in August 2011, after lifting all controls in 2009-2010.

The right to movement from Central and Eastern European countries to Western Europe was quickly embraced. For the 2004 participants, the peak was in 2006. However, the peak migration from Romania and Bulgaria was also in 2006 – a year before their EU accession.

Regarding the impact on destination countries, the United Kingdom and Ireland received disproportionately large inflows after 2004. The non-introduction of temporary controls by these two countries likely diverted immigration to them. The significant increase in migration from Bulgaria and Romania in 2006 was largely due to migration from Romania to Italy and Spain.

The increase suggests that there was a pent-up desire to move to Western Europe before these countries joined the EU. However, it is also notable that the net flow from Bulgaria and Romania in 2003-2005 – before these countries joined the EU – was virtually the same (even slightly higher) as migration in 2008-2012, after the expansion-related increase had subsided.

Evidently, many people from Bulgaria and Romania managed to find ways to move to Western Europe long before these countries joined the EU, while the modest flows in 2008-2012 could be explained by temporary mobility restrictions imposed by host countries and rising unemployment in the two main destination countries, Spain and Italy.

Country-specific mobility figures show that Germany and the United Kingdom are the main destination countries for migrants from Central and Eastern EU member states, but there are notable exceptions.

Estonians primarily move to Finland due to geographic proximity and cultural similarity. Austria is the second most important destination country for neighboring Croatia and Slovenia, and the third most important destination for Hungary.

Finally, the minor role of France is noticeable. The number of Central and Eastern European citizens in France is only about a tenth of the German figure. It is unlikely that distance is the main reason for this, as Spain – further than France – is a more popular destination for migrants from Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania.

The crisis influenced east-west migration patterns due to diminished labor market opportunities in some key destination countries like Italy and Spain. This was reflected in a slowdown of east-west mobility. However, economic developments and labor market conditions in certain Central and Eastern European countries also had a major influence on migration patterns.

There was a massive exodus from severely affected Latvia and Lithuania, where GDP and employment fell by 10-20% (Darvas, 2013). The population decreased by more than 10% in these countries during 2008-2012, with most of the population decline in 2008-12 resulting from the emigration of young cohorts, and the resident population of young people fell by about 20-25%, causing major losses to these countries. Large-scale emigration from Latvia and Lithuania continued in 2013-2016.

Starting in 2013, emigration from Central and Eastern European countries began to rise again, most likely due to better labor market opportunities in the main destination countries. Croatia, which joined the European Union in 2013, also saw an increase in emigration. Even during the crisis, there was no mass return migration, as noted by Zaiceva and Zimmerman (2011).

Instead, the rate of return migration to Central and Eastern European countries proved relatively stable. However, there are country-specific differences. For example, by 2016, return migration to Bulgaria, Hungary, and the three Baltic states increased, while it decreased in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania.

Even if return migration flows are not large, it is useful to analyze the profile of returnees to Central and Eastern European countries. Most returnees are aged 25-44 – the most mobile age group. For the Czech Republic, almost two-thirds of returnees fall within the 24-45 age group; for Slovenia, the same age group represents one-third of returnees.

A typical returnee to a Central and Eastern European country is under 45, single, male, and employed in a lower-skilled job abroad, despite holding a tertiary degree, suggesting that returnees are overqualified and may signal brain drain (Zaiceva and Zimmerman, 2011).

The EU's 2010 labor force survey documents the economic activity of returnees one year before the survey. Results suggest that most returnees (over 60% in most Central and Eastern European countries, except Slovenia, where students constitute the largest group) were employed abroad before returning.

Romania, Bulgaria, and Latvia reported the highest shares of returnees who were unemployed while abroad. Additionally, with the gradual return of post-expansion migrants, which could accelerate as they start retiring, cross-border pension transfers and social remittances could become major issues (Duszczuk and Matuszczyk, 2016).

On average, about 10% of highly skilled individuals from the EU live abroad, but there are huge differences between countries. About half of Malta's highly skilled individuals have been abroad from the 1980s to the 2010s.

The labor shortage in Central and Eastern European countries increased significantly after the 2004 EU enlargement, but there was also an increased labor shortage in northwestern EU countries during this period. These findings have two implications. First, post-EU enlargement emigration had a negative impact on labor markets in Central and Eastern Europe, creating a labor shortage.

The exodus of human capital can harm source countries by creating a labor shortage. Thus, the proportion of respondents to the European Commission's survey among businesses mentioning labor shortages as a factor hindering production for industry, services, and construction sectors.

Secondly, the immigration of these Central Europeans into northwestern EU countries did not lead to job losses for local workers at a significant rate (at least in the construction sector, other industrial and service sectors for which data is available), as labor shortages in these countries were increasing in parallel with the arrival of workers from Central and Eastern Europe.

A country's ability to attract and retain talent is an important factor that can influence human capital flight and brain drain. For example, the United Kingdom has a high capacity to both retain and attract talent, while Romania has low capacity in both areas. During 2014-2017, Central and Eastern European countries most affected by labor shortages had mixed fortunes in their ability to retain and attract talent.

Bulgaria, Poland, Estonia, and the Czech Republic became more attractive to talent during 2014-2017 (although their scores remain below those of the main destination countries in northwestern EU), while Hungary, Romania, and Latvia became less attractive to talent.

It is found that the existence of a previous colonial link, a common legal system, and a shared official language are significant determinants of the total first residence permit, regardless of the form of migration. Commonwealth citizens who are either married or the children of someone with residency rights could also have the same right of residence in the UK for an indefinite period.

Commonwealth citizens are also eligible for a UK ancestry visa, allowing them to stay in the UK for five years. In some cases, bilateral agreements can influence migration flows. Germany and Turkey, for example, have a strong migration link dating back to a bilateral labor agreement signed in 1961.

Following an initial influx and settlement in Germany of contract workers from Turkey, migration flows in the 1970s were linked to family reunification. In the 1980s, migration from Turkey to Germany had political motivations, with migrants seeking asylum.

2.2. Positive and Negative Effects of External Labor Mobility on Origin and Destination Countries

It is important to highlight that these effects can vary depending on the economic, social, and political context of each country. Here are some of the positive and negative effects:

In the country of origin, the improvement in living standards is a positive factor of migration. The money sent by emigrants in the form of remittances can contribute to improving the living conditions of families left behind. These funds can be used for education, health, and local economic development.

Advantages also exist for the destination country that receives qualified labor. Emigrants bring with them a diversity of skills and competencies, thus contributing to the improvement of the quality of the workforce in the destination countries. This can enhance productivity and economic competitiveness. Emigrants contribute to the state budget through the payment of taxes and social contributions. This supports social security systems and public infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals. The cultural diversity brought by emigrants can stimulate innovation and creativity in the business environment. Different experiences and multiple perspectives can contribute to innovative solutions to complex problems. In certain sectors, emigrants can fill labor market gaps that cannot be covered by the local workforce. This can ensure the optimal functioning of critical industries.

Dependency on remittances is another disadvantage that must be mentioned. Some countries can become dependent on remittances, and a sudden change in the flow of money can negatively impact the local economy.

This subject should also be viewed from the perspective of the destination country. Emigrants may compete with the local workforce, which can lead to pressure on wages in certain sectors, especially those with unskilled labor. A large number of emigrants can generate social and cultural tensions in the destination countries, fueling xenophobic or protectionist sentiments. Emigrants may be exposed to poor working conditions, low wages, and lack of workers' rights, making them vulnerable to exploitation. A sudden increase in population due to immigration can put pressure on health systems, education, and other social services, affecting their quality. Massive migration of skilled individuals can lead to a decrease in qualified human resources globally, affecting equitable and sustainable development.

Table 1. Remittances to Eastern Europe as a Percentage of GDP

	Remittances Received (% GDP)		
	1995	2005	2022
Poland	0.5	2.1	0.4
Hungary	0.8	0.6	0.3
Czechia	0.3	1	0.3
Slovakia	0.1	1.9	0.2
Bulgaria	0.2	5.4	1.4
Romania	0.02	1	1.5
Slovenia	1.3	0.7	0.2
Croatia	2.4	4.1	3.5
Estonia	0.03	1.8	0.1
Latvia	0.7	2.2	1.8
Lithuania	0.01	2.9	2.8

Source: Data collected and processed by the student

Most countries experienced significant fluctuations in the percentage of remittances relative to GDP during the analyzed period. Some countries saw significant increases, while others experienced notable decreases. The year 2005 appears to have been a significant turning point, with some countries recording significant increases and others notable decreases. This was also the year when many of these countries joined the European Union, and their diaspora began to grow significantly.

The evolution of remittances for certain countries indicates a possible long-term change in their economic impact. There are significant differences between countries in terms of the level and evolution of remittances, highlighting the diversity of economic and social situations in the region. Fluctuations in remittances can have significant implications for the economic stability of these countries, underscoring the need for flexible and adaptable economic and social policies.

Thus, for the year 2022, we observe a decrease in the percentage derived from remittances. The causes for this can be multiple: a significant increase in GDP, a decrease in the number of people in the diaspora, or even a severance of ties with the country of origin.

Table 2. Personal Transfers and Compensation of Employees

Year/Country	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Belgium	104.0	85.0	194.0	167.0	153.0	231.0	233.0	295.0	618.0	1,064.0
Bulgaria	850.5	825.1	848.1	869.0	1,142.3	1,186.7	1,219.1	1,319.9	1,153.2	1,199.5
Czechia	580.4	556.2	656.1	683.8	737.4	740.2	817.3	800.3	867.2	899.0
Denmark	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Germany	5.0	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Estonia	109.9	96.8	101.1	111.1	121.7	144.3	125.5	133.3	155.7	60.3
Ireland	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Greece	397.1	343.5	232.5	165.5	138.6	194.7	357.3	333.4	363.8	345.7
Spain	:	:	:	:	:	2,671.0	2,768.0	2,933.0	3,145.0	2,989.0
France	541.0	473.0	539.0	462.0	537.0	360.0	295.0	254.0	222.0	231.0
Croatia	1,217.0	1,219.0	1,346.0	1,547.0	1,669.0	1,744.0	1,914.0	1,839.0	2,051.0	2,404.0
Italy	2,097.1	2,137.9	2,244.9	2,139.0	2,130.2	1,933.2	1,986.5	1,950.0	1,927.3	2,070.0
Cyprus	192.0	186.0	205.0	199.0	219.0	233.0	245.6	205.5	207.6	216.7
Latvia	633.0	458.0	529.0	494.0	546.0	493.0	435.0	478.0	622.0	714.0
Lithuania	1,378.8	1,471.0	1,129.7	1,091.7	1,109.3	1,122.2	1,113.4	663.1	618.2	645.5
Luxembourg	110.0	46.0	92.0	54.0	55.0	59.0	84.0	91.0	69.0	87.0
Hungary	305.2	291.6	289.9	335.3	349.2	424.0	506.7	406.0	520.9	521.6
Malta	:	:	70.5	62.0	61.0	59.5	60.0	:	:	33.7
Netherlands	204.0	:	:	:	142.8	:	151.4	139.6	114.0	114.0
Austria	287.0	281.0	279.0	271.0	267.0	265.0	261.0	242.0	247.0	254.0
Poland	2,797.6	2,760.6	3,154.8	3,014.1	3,091.1	2,994.7	3,139.0	2,830.7	2,824.6	2,876.4
Portugal	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Romania	2,098.4	2,001.7	2,176.0	2,449.0	2,822.8	2,976.8	3,682.0	3,421.7	3,872.0	4,426.4
Slovenia	31.4	42.8	58.5	53.7	58.1	61.4	66.7	75.0	72.5	86.0

Year/Country	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Slovakia	0.0	207.0	283.8	222.8	231.0	224.7	273.0	259.3	246.7	264.5
Finland	76.0	76.0	76.0	76.0	76.0	76.0	76.0	76.0	76.0	76.0
Sweden	476.6	436.7	427.2	401.2	437.5	454.9	337.2	296.8	299.7	344.2

Source: Eurostat Table "Personal transfers and compensation of employees"

Countries such as Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Croatia have experienced significant increases in these transfers in recent years, reflecting possible improved economic performance or other specific factors. Certain countries, such as Spain and Italy, have recorded significant year-to-year fluctuations, which can be attributed to specific economic or political factors of each period.

The year 2020 was notable for certain countries, such as Spain, with a significant decrease or sudden increase in transfers, possibly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, most countries have registered an increase in personal transfers and employee compensation in recent years, perhaps reflecting an increase in labor mobility or other economic dynamics.

This analysis provides an overview of the evolution of personal transfers and employee compensation in Europe, highlighting the differences between countries and the impact of economic events.

2.3. Economic growth and migration

The relationship between economic growth and migration is complex and manifests in multiple ways. Generally, migration can be both a result of economic growth and a factor that influences it. Economic growth and migration are interconnected in a bidirectional and synergistic manner. On one hand, economic growth can attract migrants by offering job opportunities and higher living standards. This can be driven by the demand for labor in growing sectors, as well as developed infrastructure and improved public services. For example, the rapid growth of the technology industry in a region can attract skilled workers from other countries to take advantage of employment opportunities and higher wages.

Economic growth in European Union countries that joined after 2004 has been a significant factor in changing the dynamics of migration in these countries. This growth resulted from economic reforms, market liberalization, and European integration, which stimulated foreign investments, private sector development, and export growth.

Table 3. Annual economic growth in percentage

TIME	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Belgium	0.5	1.6	2.0	1.3	1.6	1.8	2.2	-5.3	6.9	3.0	1.4
Bulgaria	-0.5	0.9	3.4	3.0	2.7	2.7	4.0	-4.0	7.7	3.9	1.8
Czechia	0.0	2.3	5.4	2.5	5.2	3.2	3.0	-5.5	3.6	2.4	-0.3
Denmark	0.9	1.6	2.3	3.2	2.8	2.0	1.5	-2.4	6.8	2.7	1.9
Germany	0.4	2.2	1.5	2.2	2.7	1.0	1.1	-3.8	3.2	1.8	-0.3
Estonia	1.5	3.0	1.9	3.2	5.8	3.8	4.0	-1.0	7.2	-0.5	-3.0
Ireland	1.2	8.8	24.5	1.8	9.3	8.5	5.3	6.6	15.1	9.4	-3.2
Greece	-2.5	0.5	-0.2	-0.5	1.1	1.7	1.9	-9.3	8.4	5.6	2.0
Spain	-1.4	1.4	3.8	3.0	3.0	2.3	2.0	-11.2	6.4	5.8	2.5
France	0.6	1.0	1.1	1.1	2.3	1.9	1.8	-7.5	6.4	2.5	0.7
Croatia	-0.3	-0.3	2.5	3.6	3.4	3.0	3.4	-8.5	13.0	7.0	3.1
Italy	-1.8	0.0	0.8	1.3	1.7	0.9	0.5	-9.0	8.3	4.0	0.9
Cyprus	-6.6	-1.8	3.4	6.6	5.7	5.6	5.5	-3.4	9.9	5.1	2.5
Latvia	2.0	1.9	3.9	2.4	3.3	4.0	0.6	-3.5	6.7	3.0	-0.3
Lithuania	3.6	3.5	2.0	2.5	4.3	4.0	4.7	0.0	6.3	2.4	-0.3
Luxembourg	3.2	2.6	2.3	5.0	1.3	1.2	2.9	-0.9	7.2	1.4	-1.1
Hungary	1.8	4.2	3.7	2.2	4.3	5.4	4.9	-4.5	7.1	4.6	-0.9
Malta	5.5	7.6	9.6	3.4	10.9	7.4	7.1	-8.2	12.5	8.1	5.6
Netherlands	-0.1	1.4	2.0	2.2	2.9	2.4	2.0	-3.9	6.2	4.3	0.1
Austria	0.0	0.7	1.0	2.0	2.3	2.4	1.5	-6.6	4.2	4.8	-0.8
Poland	0.9	3.8	4.4	3.0	5.1	5.9	4.4	-2.0	6.9	5.6	0.2
Portugal	-0.9	0.8	1.8	2.0	3.5	2.8	2.7	-8.3	5.7	6.8	2.3
Romania	0.3	4.1	3.2	2.9	8.2	6.0	3.9	-3.7	5.7	4.1	2.1
Slovenia	-1.0	2.8	2.2	3.2	4.8	4.5	3.5	-4.2	8.2	2.5	1.6
Slovakia	0.6	2.7	5.2	1.9	2.9	4.0	2.5	-3.3	4.8	1.9	1.6
Finland	-0.9	-0.4	0.5	2.8	3.2	1.1	1.2	-2.4	2.8	1.3	-1.0
Sweden	1.2	2.7	4.5	2.1	2.6	2.0	2.0	-2.2	6.1	2.7	-0.2

Sursa: Eurostat "Annual economic growth"

After joining the EU, countries like Romania and Bulgaria were seen as sources of migration, with many citizens seeking work in more developed EU states, such as Italy, Spain, and the UK. However, economic growth has made these countries attractive to migrants, especially in sectors like construction, industry, and

technology. Migrants from Ukraine and Moldova now fill labor demands. Migration has impacted both origin and destination countries by addressing labor shortages while causing a loss of skilled workers in the origin countries, such as Romania. Migrant workers contribute to economic growth by filling labor gaps, supporting sectors like healthcare, and fostering entrepreneurship.

Remittances from migrants help increase domestic demand, support families, reduce poverty, and boost local economies in their countries of origin. Policies like work permits and family reunification influence migration flows and economic growth. Immigration's effects on labor markets depend on whether migrant workers complement or substitute local labor. Generally, immigrants are considered substitutes for unskilled workers and complements for skilled workers. Increased immigration can lower wages for low-income workers but benefit skilled ones, depending on labor market conditions and wage flexibility.

The study by Dustmann and Fabbri (2011) suggests that migration provides a valuable contribution to economic growth by filling labor market gaps and stimulating productivity growth. In the European Union (EU), migration flows are influenced by regional economic developments and disparities between member states. Generally, countries with robust economic growth and a dynamic labor market are more likely to attract migrants from other EU countries or from outside the EU. However, migration in the EU can also be influenced by non-economic factors, such as political stability, social and cultural climate, and the immigration policies of member states.

According to Ortega and Peri (2013), remittances contribute to increasing domestic demand for goods and services, having a positive impact on economic activity. Furthermore, remittances can serve as a mechanism for income redistribution and poverty reduction in rural and marginalized communities, thereby contributing to increased financial and social inclusion. These funds are often used for domestic consumption, which can stimulate demand for local goods and services and contribute to economic development.

2.4. Dynamics of Migration in Eastern Europe

A thorough analysis of human capital and trends within a country over the medium and long term is crucial for creating realistic and sustainable human resource development strategies. To achieve an objective assessment, recent studies examine various factors including the stock of human capital (which encompasses per capita investment in education and vocational training, the educational composition and health of the workforce), its effective use (measured by employment and unemployment rates, connectivity to digital networks, and participation in income or value generation), productivity (evaluated by human capital's contribution to added value, the quality of education and training, lifelong employability, and investments in research and development), and demographic shifts (such as population growth or decline, and migratory patterns, all considered in the context of their impact on the labor market).

Table 4. Change in Total Population (in percentage)

TIME	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Belgium	5.6	3.8	5.0	6.5	3.6	4.1	5.0	5.8	2.8	5.4	10.7
Bulgaria	-5.8	-5.4	-6.0	-6.7	-7.3	-7.3	-7.1	-7.0	-5.0	-11.3	-58.9
Czechia	1.0	-0.4	2.5	1.5	2.4	2.9	3.7	4.1	0.7	2.1	29.1
Denmark	4.0	4.4	5.8	8.4	7.2	5.6	4.3	2.9	3.0	5.7	10.0
Germany	2.4	3.0	5.3	12.0	4.2	3.3	2.7	1.8	-0.1	1.0	13.4
Estonia	-3.8	-3.3	-1.9	0.8	-0.2	2.7	4.3	3.1	0.8	1.3	25.3
Ireland	4.5	6.1	8.5	10.3	12.2	9.6	15.2	12.2	8.4	10.7	40.9
Greece	-7.5	-7.0	-6.3	-6.9	-1.4	-2.5	-1.5	-0.6	-3.7	-20.7	-4.4
Spain	-1.9	-4.6	-1.3	-0.2	1.9	2.8	6.0	8.4	1.4	0.7	13.7
France	4.9	5.2	4.4	2.7	2.6	3.2	3.9	2.9	2.5	3.2	3.2
Croatia	-3.2	-3.6	-5.1	-8.2	-8.7	-11.8	-7.1	-4.4	-5.4	-44.1	-3.0
Italy	4.9	18.2	0.2	-2.1	-1.3	-1.7	-2.1	-2.9	-6.8	-3.5	-0.6
Cyprus	4.5	-9.1	-12.9	1.5	7.6	11.0	13.4	13.7	9.0	9.7	17.5
Latvia	-10.3	-11.1	-7.7	-8.7	-9.6	-8.1	-7.5	-6.4	-7.6	-9.3	3.9
Lithuania	-10.6	-9.6	-7.6	-11.3	-14.2	-13.8	-5.3	0.0	0.6	3.7	18.1
Luxembourg	23.0	23.3	23.9	23.3	19.8	19.0	19.6	19.7	13.7	16.7	23.6
Hungary	-2.3	-3.2	-2.2	-2.5	-3.4	-2.0	-0.6	-0.3	-4.0	-4.3	-9.3
Malta	11.8	16.2	23.6	24.1	21.7	32.9	36.8	41.7	3.0	9.4	39.7
Netherlands	2.9	3.0	4.2	4.6	6.0	5.8	5.9	7.2	3.9	6.6	12.5
Austria	5.2	6.6	9.0	13.4	8.3	5.6	4.1	4.8	3.5	5.2	13.9
Poland	0.0	-1.2	-0.3	-1.0	0.2	0.1	-0.1	-0.4	-3.1	-4.9	-24.2
Portugal	-5.2	-5.7	-5.0	-3.2	-3.1	-1.8	-1.4	1.9	0.2	-1.9	11.1
Romania	-3.8	-3.6	-3.9	-5.6	-5.9	-5.6	-6.1	-4.4	-6.6	-8.3	0.6
Slovenia	1.6	1.1	0.9	0.6	0.8	0.5	6.8	7.2	6.2	-0.9	4.6
Slovakia	1.2	0.9	1.0	0.9	1.7	1.4	1.3	1.4	0.3	-4.6	-1.1
Finland	4.7	4.5	3.8	2.8	2.9	1.8	0.9	1.3	1.5	2.6	2.8
Sweden	7.7	9.3	10.6	10.6	14.5	12.4	10.8	9.5	5.0	7.0	6.6

Source: Eurostat Table, Population Change Percentage Compared to the Previous Year

Throughout Europe (excluding Turkey, which is a candidate for EU membership), many countries are experiencing demographic stagnation or decline, leading to a general aging of the population. This issue is particularly concerning for Central European nations that have joined the European Union. These countries face extremely low birth rates, resulting in a shrinking active workforce, coupled with the emigration of young people and those with medium to high qualifications. Additionally, there is a growing concern about the inadequate alignment of training with market demands and the acquisition of skills essential for advancing to a knowledge-based, innovative society. Experts warn that if current trends continue, Central and Eastern European countries may, in the coming decades, face the risk of becoming sparsely populated regions with a dwindling labor force, struggling to support an increasingly elderly population.

Table 4. Total population

TIME	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Belgium	11,331,422	11,375,158	11,427,054	11,488,980	11,538,604	11,586,195	11,680,210
Bulgaria	7,127,822	7,075,947	7,025,037	6,975,761	6,934,015	6,877,743	6,643,324
Czechia	10,566,332	10,594,438	10,629,928	10,671,870	10,697,858	10,505,772	10,672,118
Denmark	5,728,010	5,764,980	5,793,636	5,814,422	5,831,404	5,856,733	5,903,037
Germany	82,348,669	82,657,002	82,905,782	83,092,962	83,160,871	83,196,078	83,797,985
Estonia	1,315,790	1,317,384	1,321,977	1,326,898	1,329,522	1,330,932	1,348,840
Ireland	4,755,335	4,807,388	4,867,316	4,934,340	4,985,382	5,033,164	5,165,700
Greece	10,775,971	10,754,679	10,732,882	10,721,582	10,698,599	10,569,207	10,436,882
Spain	46,484,062	46,593,236	46,797,754	47,134,837	47,365,655	47,415,794	47,759,127
France	66,724,104	66,918,020	67,158,348	67,388,001	67,571,107	67,764,304	68,065,015
Croatia	4,172,441	4,129,853	4,090,870	4,067,206	4,047,260	3,949,330	3,856,600
Italy	60,627,498	60,536,709	60,421,760	59,729,081	59,438,851	59,133,173	59,013,667
Cyprus	851,561	859,519	870,068	881,952	892,006	900,356	912,703
Latvia	1,959,537	1,942,248	1,927,174	1,913,822	1,900,449	1,884,490	1,879,383
Lithuania	2,868,231	2,828,403	2,801,543	2,794,137	2,794,885	2,800,839	2,831,639
Luxembourg	582,014	596,336	607,950	620,001	630,419	640,064	653,103
Hungary	9,814,023	9,787,966	9,775,564	9,771,141	9,750,149	9,709,891	9,644,377
Malta	455,356	467,999	484,630	504,062	515,332	518,536	531,511
Netherlands	17,030,314	17,131,296	17,231,624	17,344,874	17,441,500	17,533,044	17,700,982
Austria	8,736,668	8,797,566	8,840,521	8,879,920	8,916,864	8,955,797	9,041,851
Poland	37,970,087	37,974,826	37,974,750	37,965,475	37,899,070	37,747,124	37,203,992
Portugal	10,325,452	10,300,300	10,283,822	10,286,263	10,297,081	10,361,831	10,409,704
Romania	19,702,267	19,588,715	19,473,970	19,371,648	19,265,250	19,122,059	19,048,502
Slovenia	2,065,042	2,066,388	2,073,894	2,088,385	2,102,419	2,108,079	2,112,076
Slovakia	5,430,798	5,439,232	5,446,771	5,454,147	5,458,827	5,447,247	5,431,752
Finland	5,495,303	5,508,214	5,515,525	5,521,606	5,529,543	5,541,017	5,556,106
Sweden	9,923,085	10,057,698	10,175,214	10,278,887	10,353,442	10,415,811	10,486,941

Source: Total population

When migration enhances individuals' skills, it can motivate others to migrate by providing access to remittances, information, and social networks that reduce the costs and risks of relocation. However, skilled migrants may also limit opportunities for future migrants, restricting others' chances to follow the same path. Migration plays a crucial role in access to social and economic resources, but migrants face structural barriers that limit their ability to drive change. Voluntary and forced migration differ in the degree of choice available, but both are influenced by the economic and political conditions of the destination.

A paradox exists where human development improves the ability to migrate, but constraints in social, economic, or political environments motivate migration. Migration from less developed regions, like Sub-Saharan Africa, is selective and costly, often involving wealthier and more skilled individuals, while migration from more developed areas is less restrictive. Although migration can lead to wealth accumulation, it can also decrease well-being, particularly when driven by severe constraints.

There are three key ways migration and human development are connected. First, a minimum level of development is needed for migration, as people require freedom and resources. Migration under coercion, such as political conflict or slavery, reflects a lack of freedom. Second, migration can improve the well-being of migrants, their families, and communities by enhancing living standards. Lastly, migration can drive broader economic and social change, but its impact depends on context. In unstable regions like Somalia, remittances improve living conditions, but weak governance limits broader development.

Table 5. Medium wages

TIME	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Belgium	21,705	21,654	22,295	22,733	23,686	24,608	25,672	25,855	27,314	28,997
Bulgaria	3,311	3,332	3,151	3,590	3,590	4,224	4,612	5,157	5,378	6,523

TIME	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Czechia	7,622	7,423	7,838	8,282	9,088	9,995	10,627	10,625	12,146	13,656
Denmark	27,861	28,364	28,670	29,387	30,104	30,726	30,674	32,088	33,260	33,903
Germany	19,735	20,668	21,275	21,920	22,713	23,515	26,003	24,947	24,950	26,240
Estonia	7,217	7,889	8,645	9,390	10,524	11,461	12,228	12,623	14,827	15,128
Ireland	20,171	21,664	22,544	22,879	24,920	25,528	26,758	28,130	29,060	:
Greece	7,680	7,520	7,500	7,600	7,863	8,195	8,781	8,752	9,520	:
Spain	13,269	13,352	13,681	14,203	14,785	15,015	16,043	15,892	16,814	18,316
France	21,204	21,415	21,713	21,960	22,220	22,562	22,143	22,732	23,053	:
Croatia	5,225	5,453	5,726	6,210	6,659	7,306	7,892	8,061	8,760	:
Italy	15,759	15,846	16,247	16,542	16,844	17,165	18,067	17,532	18,592	:
Cyprus	14,400	13,793	14,020	14,497	15,336	16,215	16,704	16,686	17,856	:
Latvia	5,203	5,828	6,365	6,607	7,333	:	8,827	9,437	10,258	11,258
Lithuania	4,823	5,180	5,645	6,134	6,895	7,586	8,606	9,669	10,195	:
Luxembourg	34,320	35,270	32,841	36,315	34,472	36,354	37,844	42,482	45,310	:
Hungary	4,512	4,549	4,768	4,988	5,424	5,852	6,478	6,619	6,975	:
Malta	12,808	13,551	13,617	14,522	14,781	15,354	16,240	17,036	18,155	:
Netherlands	20,896	21,296	22,733	23,561	24,016	24,612	25,801	28,441	29,537	:
Austria	23,211	23,260	23,694	24,752	25,176	25,729	26,555	27,428	27,844	:
Poland	5,336	5,556	5,884	5,945	6,574	7,124	8,022	8,297	8,946	:
Portugal	8,229	8,435	8,782	9,066	9,346	10,023	10,800	11,090	11,010	:
Romania	2,155	2,315	2,448	2,742	3,284	3,851	4,267	4,830	5,512	:
Slovenia	11,909	12,332	12,327	12,713	13,244	14,067	14,774	15,415	16,544	18,053
Slovakia	6,809	6,930	6,951	7,183	7,462	8,119	8,703	8,473	8,819	9,214
Finland	23,702	23,763	23,650	23,987	24,544	24,879	25,490	25,456	26,541	27,346
Sweden	25,925	25,329	25,164	25,376	25,500	24,467	24,710	25,498	26,729	27,308

Source: Medium wage

Immigration is driven not only by wage differences between rich and poor countries but also by broader economic trends and the demand for low-cost labor in developed nations. Migration networks, formed during the migration process, help sustain migration despite economic shifts or stricter policies. Migration has mixed social impacts: it boosts local economies, encourages entrepreneurship, and fosters tolerance but can also create dependence on remittances and contribute to issues like human trafficking.

Migration exposes individuals to new cultures and experiences, aiding personal growth. However, working abroad can disrupt skill development and harm professional continuity, particularly for highly skilled migrants whose home countries lose out on the benefits of their education and training. Migrants remain connected to their countries of origin through remittances, investments, and civil society contributions. While migration can alleviate unemployment and poverty, it may also suppress political dissent, benefiting elites rather than promoting structural reform.

Remittances are a key economic driver for many developing countries, providing a stable source of income and foreign exchange. They support household consumption, entrepreneurship, and GDP growth, even in areas less reached by official aid or private investment. For example, between 2005 and 2010, Romanians working abroad sent back \$38.8 billion, and remittances accounted for 4.4% of Romania's GDP in 2009. Similarly, remittances play a significant role in the economies of Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, and Moldova.

In the European Union, southern and eastern countries often bear the responsibility of protecting external borders, benefiting northern and western nations. To share these costs, the EU established funds like the External Borders Fund and the EU Return Fund, with a combined budget of over €4 billion for 2007-2013, aimed at managing migration and refugee flows and ensuring fair distribution of responsibilities across member states. The European Pact on Immigration and Asylum, adopted in 2008, sets a common strategy for managing migration in the EU.

3. Conclusions

The migration of labor from Central and Eastern Europe to Western Europe has been significantly shaped by economic opportunities and disparities, with the expansion of the European Union facilitating this movement. While this mobility has provided substantial economic benefits for destination countries through the influx of skilled labor and cultural diversity, it has also introduced notable challenges for origin countries, particularly in the form of brain drain and labor shortages.

To effectively address these challenges, both origin and destination countries must implement flexible and adaptive policies. Origin countries should focus on strategies to retain talent and optimize the use of

remittances sent by emigrants. Such strategies could include investing in education and professional training, providing incentives for local businesses, and improving domestic economic conditions. Additionally, destination countries need to ensure that migration does not lead to social tensions or the exploitation of workers. They can achieve this by implementing policies that promote fair integration of migrants, protect their rights, and prevent discrimination in the labor market.

Maintaining a balance between the positive and negative impacts of migration is a delicate process that requires coordinated efforts at both national and European levels. It is crucial for policies and measures to aim at maximizing the benefits of labor migration while minimizing adverse effects, to foster sustainable and equitable economic development across Europe.

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