

Challenges facing free movement  
in the European Union after Brexit  
and the COVID-19 pandemic



# CHALLENGES FACING FREE MOVEMENT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AFTER BREXIT AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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## Editor's note

Our volume 'Challenges facing free movement in the European Union after Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic' wishes to consider the state and political consequences on internal migration in the European Union. A new development in the European Union since 2015 was the migration issue as a central political campaign topic in old and new member states as well. However, while immigration into the European Union is widely discussed, internal migration within the EU is a neglected issue in pan-European debates. Nevertheless internal migration caused social, political tensions in host countries and in countries of origin as well. During the Brexit campaign anti-migrant sentiments were oriented towards citizens of new member states. Nevertheless there are also good practices of integration in host countries. In Hungary and Poland westward migration is deemed as a political answer to illiberalism. While in the old member states cheap labor force from the east is perceived as a threat for blue-collar workers, in new member states internal migration drains skilled workforce. These conflicts over the free movement of workers can seriously harm the idea of a single European market. The volume wishes to point out that the free movement of workers should promote a European single market, global competitiveness and stability but not social and political disturbance. This issue is becoming more relevant after the COVID-19 appeared in Europe as well, as free movement was seriously constrained in the Schengen Area. While the consequences of the new coronavirus on free movement in the EU is yet unknown, it could seriously harm the idea of unrestricted mobility in Europe.

This volume is published as part of the European Liberal Forum and Republikon Institute's project 'Internal migration in the European Union: liberal answers'. The contributors in this volume assess the political and economic conflicts, actions, consequences caused by these tensions, inter alia the Brexit, rise of the populist right, workforce shortage and brain drain in new member states, politically motivated westward migration and the COVID-19 pandemic. Carmen Descamps analyzes the institutional background of EU citizenship and discusses the consequences of Brexit on mobility in the European Union. She warns that many EU citizens have built a life in the notion of borderless mobility in the EU. Also, the mobility of citizens can be a crucial part of upcoming negotiations between the EU and the United Kingdom. Nils Erik Forsgård focuses on the demographic and workforce developments in Nordic countries and especially in Finland. He concludes that the challenges stemming from an ageing society can be solved only with the help of external migration. Giulio Saputo discusses the meaning of nationalism from a historical-philosophical perspective. According to him national identities cannot be simply substituted with a similar European nationalism, which would only reaffirm the idea of "Fortress Europe". Instead of that civilization, consistent high moral principles can be the frameworks of the right political decisions. Andrea Virág and her colleagues analysing

the Hungarian case of youth, student mobility in Europe. They identify two contradictory tendencies: while the number of students and workers leaving Hungary also because of political reasons is growing, the lack of proper, state funded foreign language education is the most relevant obstacle of intra-European mobility. The authors also make recommendations in order to ease these problems, while reinforcing the freedom of mobility in the EU.





# Carmen Descamps: **DISRUPTING EU CITIZENSHIP? WHAT BREXIT MEANS FOR THE FUTURE OF FREE MOVEMENT AND CITIZENS' RIGHTS FOR EU AND UK CITIZENS**

## Introduction

For more than four years already, the looming Brexit continues both fascinating and haunting citizens on both sides of the Channel. Like the sword of Damocles, which incessantly hovers over all those involved and affected, hoping to find the lowest common denominator to be sealed with an agreement.

At the time of writing, the outcome of the joint EU-UK-negotiations in the context of the first withdrawal of a member state from the European Union is merely predictable. Political representatives on both sides spent hours negotiating the terms of future relations between the EU and Great Britain, some of them for the best, some for the worst. Several months before the end of the transition period in December 2020 (if not further extended), the much-feared worst case of a 'no deal' scenario is far from being off the table. It is not too late, but time flies by, mutual confidence has been damaged multiple times and leaders worldwide are distracted by COVID-19. Unlike what British Prime Minister Boris Johnson proclaimed, a 'no deal' scenario would neither be in the interest of British citizens, nor help the Kingdom to regain full control over its "laws, rules and fishing waters" (Adler, 2020). Other than the internal market, it is also citizens' rights which are threatened. The United Kingdom leaving the EU with or without a deal would have huge consequences for internal migration within the EU – for British citizens living both in- and outside the country as well as for Europeans residing on UK territory. Free movement of people is a cornerstone of the European Union and many people have built their private and professional life on the basis of rights flowing from their country's EU membership. However, free movement is often framed along a cost-benefit rationale for EU member states rather than analysed from citizens' perspective. Many Brexit discussions are no exception to this.

This contribution argues that EU citizenship is far more than free movement and serves as a tool of political and cultural integration in the EU. The first part highlights the various rights arising from EU citizenship. In addition to unrestricted mobility, UK nationals are likely to lose a whole set of EU citizenship rights arising from their country's EU membership. Moreover, European residents in the UK will lose additional protection for mobile citizens provided by EU citizenship rights. A subsequent overview of numbers and profiles of those different groups of people likely to be particularly affected by Brexit helps to better understand the complex situations arising across the EU.

The second part of this contribution explores the Withdrawal Agreement as a political answer to the Brexit referendum. The analysis continues with civic answers proposing alternative citizenship schemes and addressing the agreement's shortcomings in order to safeguard the rights of EU and UK citizens. Since 2016, both groups are finding themselves in a situation comparable to a legal limbo and their situation could worsen with a 'no deal' scenario. Despite continuous attempts by EU and UK institutions to agree on the best possible options for citizens, critics point out that citizens' rights as such are not sufficiently highlighted in the current negotiations and rather treated as part of larger, mostly economically-related provisions.

This analysis aims to give an overview about what Brexit means for EU citizenship, both from a conceptual and a citizen-oriented perspective and by focusing on UK nationals in the EU and EU citizens in the United Kingdom. Moreover, by highlighting the institutional as well as the civic approach (top down vs. bottom-up), it seeks to contribute to the multi-level discourse on citizens' rights in a post-Brexit scenario and in general to highlight the added value of EU citizenship. However, the author does neither aspire to provide an exhaustive view, nor deems effective to analyse EU-UK-negotiations in detail as they might be outdated by the time of publication.

## EU citizenship – a whole set of rights for Europeans

Concerning the Brexit referendum on 23 June 2016 resulting in a slight majority of 52% in favour of leaving the EU, the following quote by Winston Churchill could not have been truer and more suitable:

*“No one pretends democracy is perfect or all-wise. It has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time; but there is the broad feeling in our country that the people should rule, continuously rule, and that public opinion, expressed by all constitutional means, should shape, guide, and control the actions of Ministers who are their servants and not their masters”*

*Winston Churchill speaking in the House of Commons, 1947*

*(House of Commons, 1947)*

For the first time in history, after seven successive rounds of enlargement from six member states to 28, the European Union for the first time loses one of its members with the UK triggering the “exit-clause” in Article 50 TEU. By now, history has shown that it was more than a simple expression of the democratic will by British citizens, and the following negotiations rather a textbook example of how not to end a long-time relationship.

Before plunging into post-Brexit realities, it is worthwhile to shed light on what is commonly called “EU citizenship” - a set of rights which every citizen of an EU member state is entitled to. It becomes clear from this basic definition that, at least under present law, EU citizenship will cease for UK nationals at the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020.

### Additional citizenship – what’s in it for European citizens?

The idea of rallying European citizens with different nationalities under a new form of citizenship dates back to the 1950’s, but it was not until the 1992 and the Treaty of Maastricht that European citizens could officially rely on their supranational, European citizenship. As Spriet (2020) argues, the concept has steadily evolved in the course of European integration and far more to offer than a merely economic notion. While free movement is closely related to the market and economy-based rationale of the EU and the movement of workers, European citizenship also highlights other aspects of European integration, such as its political and cultural notions. European citizenship grants European citizens a set of fundamental rights and privileges, which are additional to their national citizenship.

*“Citizenship of the Union is hereby established. Every person holding the nationality of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union.”*

Article 20, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

There is a difference between EU citizenship and nationality: both are complementary, meaning that the former does not replace the latter, but cannot exist without it either because of the precondition of a country’s EU membership. Nowadays, nine in ten Europeans share this basic understanding, a fact which also translates the highest pan-European awareness of the concept so far (European Commission, 2020a). However, it does not preclude citizens from establishing a personal hierarchy and identifying themselves first as Europeans and second as nationals of their home countries, or both at the same time (European Commission, 2018).

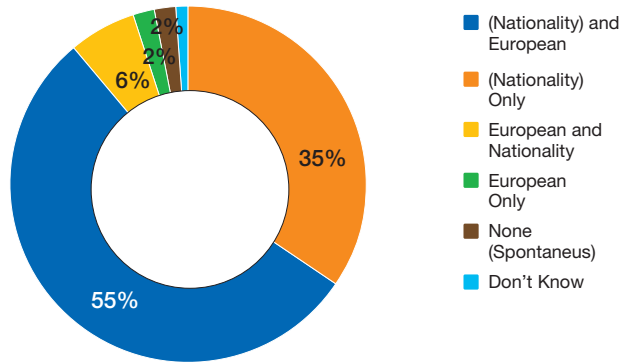
*Do you see yourself as...?*

Figure 1: Identification with the EU and its member states (2018)

Source: Standard Eurobarometer 89, European Commission

More recent Eurobarometer surveys simply ask whether one feels as a European citizen. While 70% of all respondents across the EU agree with this statement, only a slight majority of 53% in the United Kingdom do so (European Commission, 2019). It is therefore legitimate to question the attachment of UK citizens to their European citizenship, also taking into account that mobile UK citizens being firmly attached to their EU citizenship represent a bias while Eurobarometer surveys show a more representative image of society.

EU citizenship is not only of interest to citizens residing outside their countries of origin, so-called 'mobile' citizens. Citizenship provisions apply to every citizen of the Union, hence also to the 'static' ones who do not yet exercise their mobility rights. It is true that EU citizenship offers a multitude of fundamental rights for people known as "mobile citizens", such as the right to vote and stand for European elections outside their country of origin. The rationale behind citizenship provisions being specifically suited to cross-border situations is that once mobile citizens cannot invoke national legislation, they can rely on an additional level of protection provided by EU citizenship. The underlying rationale for these broader rights is that citizens should not be in a less advantageous situation when exercising their right to free movement within the EU. EU citizenship rights are summarised in different groups: freedom of movement, political and electoral rights, protective rights, right to information and the right to equality and non-discrimination.

The following table depicts the specific rights related to EU citizenship and underlines the fact that, other than the right to free movement, European citizenship allows participation in decision-making to an extent that goes far beyond the mere sum of individual, national rights. It also shows that European citizenship does not entail any duties or obligations (Kochenov, 2014).

EU Citizenship				
Article 20	Article 21	Article 22	Article 23	Article 24
<p>establishment of EU citizenship for every national of an EU member state</p> <p>additional to national citizenship</p> <p>right to move and reside freely within the EU</p> <p>&gt; no cross-border element</p>	<p>right to move and reside freely within the EU</p> <p>&gt; cross-border element</p>	<p>right to vote and be eligible at European and municipal elections</p>	<p>right to subsidiary diplomatic protection outside the EU</p>	<p>right to initiate and support a European Citizens' Initiative (with Art. 11 TEU)</p> <p>right to petition to European institutions</p> <p>right to apply to the European Ombudsman</p> <p>right to information and to address the EU institutions in your own language</p>
<p><b>Articles 18 &amp; 19</b> – principles of non-discrimination: equality and non-discrimination on the grounds of nationality, gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or disbelief, disability, age or sexual orientation</p>				

Figure 2: EU citizenship at a glance

Source: Descamps, 2020

### Freedom of Movement (Art. 20 & 21 TFEU)

Unrestricted mobility (Art. 20 & 21 TFEU) is the “beating heart” (Joppke, 2019, p. 199) of EU citizenship provisions: it grants European citizens the right to move and reside freely on EU territory. For most Europeans, the main motivation – apart from short-term travel – to cross a border and to settle in another EU country is for work or studies. Especially young people seize the opportunity to improve their skills and competences abroad thanks to numerous, often EU-funded programs such as Leonardo, Erasmus+ or the European Voluntary Service. With international experience being highly valued by future employers, many believe that training, education or volunteering has a positive impact on their career prospects. Moreover, freedom of movement and related EU-funded

programs open the door to new possibilities, such as studying at prestigious European universities while being exempted from tuition fees or learning how to bake a lemon pie from one of the best French pâtisseries.

Further issues arising from free movement and facilitated by EU law are, for instance, information about pension entitlements for EU citizens having worked in several countries, exchange of information between social security authorities, the right to open a basic bank account irrespective of the applicant's financial situation and country of residence within the EU as well as the right to choose healthcare and to be reimbursed. EU citizenship provisions join the core provisions on freedom of movement, being freedom of workers (Art. 45-48), freedom of services (Art. 49-55) and freedom of capital (Art. 56-62 TFEU).

### Political and Electoral Rights (Art. 22 & 24 TFEU)

To enable democratic participation of European citizens in the political life of the European Union at local, that is on the member state's and on European level, Article 22 TFEU grants the right to vote and stand in European and municipal elections. Mobile EU citizens can shape politics actively as candidates or by exercising their voting rights at their place of residence if they wish to. For European elections, citizens have to choose between voting in their country of origin or their country of residence. In 2020, seven out of ten Europeans knew about the possibility for non-national citizens to vote and stand as candidates in elections to the European Parliament (European Commission, 2020a). Although the level of awareness increased by four percentage points since 2015 and has almost reached its record level from 2012, the absence of a unified procedure for voting in one's host country unfortunately still leads to missed voting opportunities, mostly due to a lack of information on requirements and registration deadlines (Descamps, 2020). Recent examples of non-nationals on voting lists are Sandro Gozi (Italy) and Chrysoula Zacharopoulou (Greece) for the French list Renaissance during the European elections in May 2019 or German national Dominic Samuel Fritz during Romanian local elections 2020 as mayor of Timișoara.

Further rights for EU citizens aim at giving a voice to citizens and their concerns, thus fostering active citizenship and political participation outside election cycles. Initiating and signing a petition as well as a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) fall under that scope. Likewise, EU citizens can apply to the European Ombudsman to launch an investigation and petition to the European Parliament if they feel their rights have not been respected. Through a European Citizens' Initiative, an instrument introduced with the Treaty of Lisbon and entering into force in 2012, European citizens can invite the Commission to take action on a topic of pan-European concern. Upon successful collection one million signatures in at least seven EU member states within a year, the institution can propose a legal act within the scope of its competences to address the issue. Several Brexit-related ECIs will be presented in the second part of this contribution.

### Protective Rights (Art. 23 TFEU)

EU citizenship provisions also grant rights outside the EU. During travel, EU citizens might one day find themselves outside the geographical scope of their home authorities and thus without an embassy or a consulate able to provide immediate assistance. In the event of crises or individual emergencies such as loss of passport, accident or detention, EU citizens can rely on the right to diplomatic protection. What are commonly known as “unrepresented EU-citizens” are entitled to seek assistance at any other embassy or consulate of an EU member state.

### Information Rights in Treaty Languages (Art. 24 TFEU)

In addition to the freedom of information (Art. 15 TEU), citizenship provisions foresee that EU citizens can address the EU institutions in their language (any of the official EU languages) and receive an answer in the same language. Despite Malta and Ireland having registered Maltese and Irish (Gaelic) as their official languages for EU purposes alongside with English, the language of Shakespeare will still remain one of the EU’s working and official languages after Brexit (European Parliament, 2017). However, the share of English native speakers will sharply decrease from 14,0% to 1,2% following Brexit (Eurostat, 2020).

The evaluation of the citizenship provisions is foreseen every three years (Art. 25 TFEU) and its results summarised in a citizenship report by the European Commission, the next being due for 2020.

### Equality and Non-Discrimination (Art. 18 & 19)

European citizenship would be incomplete without an egalitarian, non-discriminatory approach to all citizens of the Union. The equal application of the above-mentioned citizenship provisions is only successful if European citizens are treated equally. They are therefore entitled to equal access to their rights, regardless of their nationality, gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. In an ever more diverse EU with a high labour mobility within its territory, non-discrimination against nationals of other member states is of utmost importance.

Following from the foregoing, it becomes apparent that most of the rights resulting from UK’s membership in the European Union will cease for British nationals after Brexit. While EU nationals will still be able to reside in the United Kingdom following Brexit under conditions negotiated under the umbrella of a settlement scheme, evoking broader rights related to free movement might prove difficult. Neither British citizens nor EU nationals residing in the United Kingdom will be able to invoke their political, electoral and protective rights anymore in a post-Brexit scenario.

### Symbolic value of EU citizenship

Other than rights, EU citizenship offers something which is undoubtedly less tangible

than the aforementioned rights, privileges, but nonetheless valuable from an immaterial and symbolic point of view: the opportunity to create a bond with other fellow Europeans around shared values and convictions, for instance those enshrined in the Treaties: Respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. A feeling of common belonging by shared convictions and history, cross-border interaction and the discovery of foreign cultures and countries across the EU; contributing to a European identity as partially expressed in the aforementioned polls. Nonetheless, the symbolic concept of EU citizenship also has its shortcomings. It excludes all those who, by their nationality, are not EU citizens, but still might share similar convictions or values, for instance Ukrainian people during Euromaidan 2013/2014.

### Living abroad – who are they and how many?

#### British nationals across the EU and European citizens in the UK

As shown, every EU citizen can invoke the citizenship provisions enshrined in the Treaties, irrespective of the place of residence or nationality. Strumia (2020) therefore underlines that “Brexit is an impoverishment of the status of citizenship for every national of a member state, albeit an impoverishment of different intensity for UK nationals and other EU citizens respectively” (p. 49). Other than the distinction by nationality (UK citizen vs. non-UK citizen), it is also important to differentiate by place of residence for the aim of this chapter. Hence, though Brexit is a threat to the rights of static and mobile citizens alike, this contribution shall focus on mobile citizens. The bias resulting from such a choice is acknowledged and on purpose, but unfortunately not an exception in this regard. ‘Static’ UK nationals have been far less at the centre of public interest and discussions on the loss of rights after Brexit. They will not only lose the above-mentioned political rights, but also the very choice of whether to become mobile, as further exemplified below.

The following section takes a brief look at the two groups of mobile EU citizens that are likely to be most affected by a loss or ‘downgrading’ of rights after the UK’s withdrawal from the EU, as Brexit-related attention to particular groups of European citizens confirm (Austin-Greenall & Lipinska, 2018): (1) British nationals across the EU and (2) European citizens in the UK.

#### British nationals across the EU

For the first group, British nationals across the EU, it is relevant to know that only British voters living outside the UK for less than 15 years and having been registered voters before leaving the country were eligible to participate in the Brexit referendum. As a consequence, long-term residents abroad as well as young people, i.e. students, could not express their opinion. Such a disenfranchisement or not-yet enfranchisement often fuelled a feeling of anger and disappointment especially among young pro-European British citizens, as the outcome of the referendum represents even more devastating consequences for the latter. A whole generation of ‘static’ British Youth, being born



with the supranational citizenship status, will thus be deprived of enjoying those rights without ever having been able to actively rely on or even defend them in the first place (Strumia, 2020).

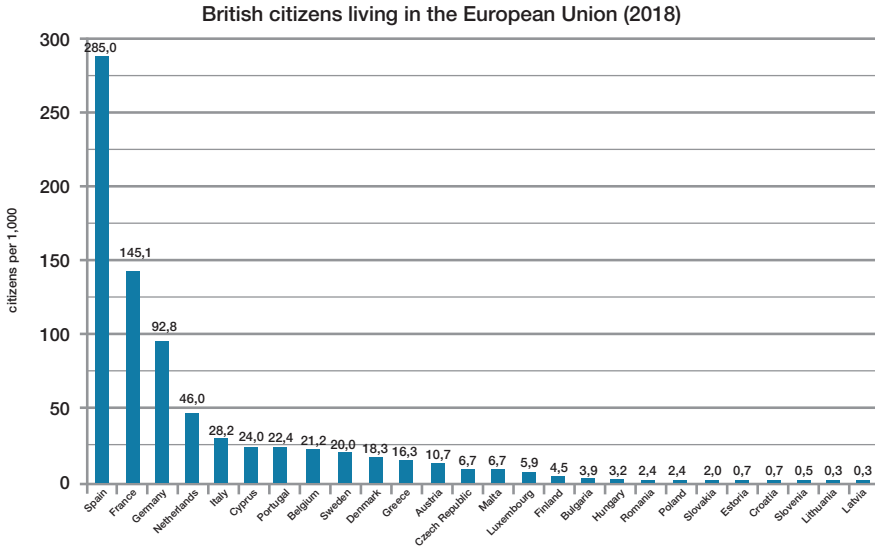


Figure 3: Number of British nationals living in the European Union (except Ireland) (2018)

Source: Statista, 2019

In 2018, some 770 thousand UK nationals, amounting to one out of four registered British expats, chose the EU (except Ireland) as their favourite destination. However, experts deem this figure to be two to three times higher, also taking into account many non-registered persons, cross-border workers, and second-home owners. The reason is that official figures only count citizens who have been in the country for more than 12 months. This approach excludes British citizens living overseas for a relatively short period of time, mostly students, short-time or seasonal workers. In addition, registration is not mandatory in every EU country, for instance in France (Benson, 2019). More recent estimates for 2020 put the number of UK nationals in the EU at one million (The British in Europe – and Vice Versa, 2020).

Almost two out of three British expats in the EU (except Ireland) live in Spain, France or Germany. Among the 25 countries to choose from, Spain remains by far the most desirable location for 37% of British citizens in the EU. Taking a closer look at different age groups, countries with favourable climatic conditions such as Spain, Portugal and France, but also Bulgaria, Malta and Cyprus unsurprisingly show high proportions of an elderly British diaspora (> 65 years). It is notable that the British expat population in

Europe counts more retirees and fewer children than the general UK population. Still, the majority of British expats are not retirees but workers. Finland and the Czech Republic count the highest proportion of British citizens of working age (25 - 64 years), while France counts most British children (< 15 years) living in the EU. A non-representative survey among British expats in the EU highlighted the fact that free movement is conceived far beyond its legal boundaries, also representing openness towards new cultures and experiences (Collins & O'Reilly, 2018).

All British citizens, notwithstanding if they were given the chance to express their opinion in 2016's referendum or not, will lose their entire status as European citizens, including the "rich armory of rights set in the European Treaties and secondary legislation, and whose scope the European Court of Justice (CJEU) has stretched in several directions." (Strumia, 2020, p. 49) after the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020. Approaches to safeguard their rights will be analysed in the second part of this contribution.

### European residents in the UK

In terms of nationality, the second group of Europeans likely to be most affected by free movement restrictions after Brexit are European citizens residing in the United Kingdom. In 2019, they accounted for 3.4 million people in total. The Polish population was by far the most numerous non-British nationality in the UK with 902 thousand Polish nationals, followed by 457 thousand Romanians. The high numbers for Southern Europe (Italy, Portugal and Spain) are testimonies of an immigration surge after the Eurozone crisis.

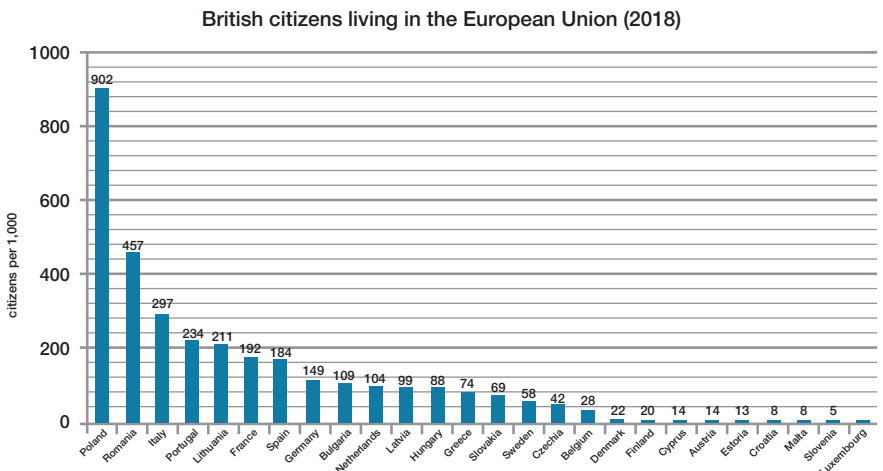


Figure 4: Number of European citizens living in the UK (except Irish citizens) (2019)

Source: Statista, 2020a

It is interesting to note that although the Polish diaspora is still the largest in the UK, its size steadily declined since a peak in 2017 with over 1 million Polish nationals in the UK. We can assume that this drop-in migration is a likely consequence of the Brexit vote in 2016, further supported by the fact that the Polish population of the United Kingdom more than doubled between 2008-2019 after Poland's EU accession in 2004. In a post-Brexit scenario, there is a risk of EU nationals in the UK losing residence and rights, for instance to access social benefits and to democratic participation in the UK. We will take a closer look at potential consequences and relevant decisions in the next part of this contribution.

While a large number of the British expats in the EU seek the sunny shores of Spain and France for retirement, long-time migration towards the UK is mostly work-related. However, intra-European mobility and especially labour mobility are sometimes causing conflicts in the EU; in particular migration towards the so-called "old" EU-15 member states after the EU accession of ten Central and Eastern European (CEE) member states in 2004. Not only in the UK, foreign workers have faced hostile attitudes by local populations and politicians linked to the "posted workers" debate stemming from a directive in 1996, revised in 2018 (Dunin-Wasowicz, 2018). The European Single Market and with it free movement, initially intended to promote prosperity and cross-border opportunities, also triggered negative side-effects of nationalist and anti-European resentment.

The myth of the "Polish plumber", a metaphor for cheap labour and jobs that are supposedly "taken away" from local blue-collar workers by relying on the posted workers directive has not only fuelled the Leave campaign of the Brexit referendum, but also much earlier the rejection of the 2005 constitutional referendum in France. Posted workers often perform vital tasks in sectors such as construction, transport and agriculture and occupy jobs that are not necessarily popular among locals. Without elaborating too much on shortcomings of current European labour legislation, which is not the focus of this analysis, it shall nevertheless be highlighted that the initial idea of posted workers is that of a temporary service-based occupation in another EU member state. It implies that posted workers are not considered as mobile EU citizens who seek to integrate their host country's labour market on a long-term or permanent basis. The temporary nature of their contracts or even undeclared work often go hand in hand with exploitation of posted workers who, at least in practice, do not enjoy the same rights and benefits as their permanently employed counterparts. The legal obligation for posted workers to register in their host country if their stay exceeds three months aims to prevent such abuses and increase visibility. Nevertheless, as already highlighted for UK residents in the EU, it can be assumed that the estimated number of unreported EU nationals in the UK is even higher than the aforementioned numbers. Those elements combined with crises prompting mobility restrictions such as Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic underline once again the exposure to risk of such groups.

## The struggle to secure citizens' rights post-Brexit

At the time of writing, the United Kingdom is a third country after leaving the European Union on 31 January 2020 and is approaching the final quarter of the transition period (currently) set to end on 31 December 2020. During the “transition period”, there were no fundamental changes for citizens, consumers, businesses, investors, students and researchers in the EU and the UK. EU law continued to apply in the United Kingdom during the transition period. However, the UK lost its representation in the European institutions, agencies, bodies and offices. Among the most memorable moments in that regard was the farewell of the European Parliament to its British members, singing “Auld Lang Syne” after having approved the EU-UK-Withdrawal Agreement on 29 January 2020.

Notwithstanding political discussions on the future relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom after the end of the transition period, many citizens are worried about their future – either as British citizens in the EU or as European citizens in the United Kingdom. As already pointed out, a partial or complete loss of their citizenship rights and with it free movement would have considerable negative consequences on their private and professional life. Political representatives, civil society organisations and individuals repeatedly criticised the legal uncertainty British and European citizens are still facing with regard to citizens' rights, all the more during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Political answers to Brexit: The Withdrawal Agreement

*"The Withdrawal Agreement creates legal certainty where Brexit created uncertainty. It preserves the Union's interests."*

Michel Barnier, 17 October 2019  
(European Commission, 2020b)

In light of the still ongoing negotiations between the United Kingdom and the European Union, this contribution aims to focus on the Withdrawal Agreement as major bilateral agreement between both parties. With international law, such as the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties and the European Convention on Human Rights, being of little help for citizens at risk of losing their rights in the framework of Brexit, the Withdrawal Agreement constitutes the most likely source of protection for citizens to date (Austin-Greenall & Lipinska, 2018).

Particular attention will be paid to provisions granting equal rights to the citizenship provisions discussed earlier. The aim of the following section is not to give a detailed account of the current state of negotiations which might be obsolete by the time of publication, but rather to highlight the main points of agreement and current shortcomings to be improved. It shall however be mentioned that the introduction of the UK's Internal

Market Bill 2019-21 in September 2020 threatens to overwrite the above mentioned agreement in several regards. In particular, it jeopardizes the Good Friday Agreement by resiling away from the Northern Ireland protocol contained in the Withdrawal Agreement and which seeks to prevent a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič therefore stressed after the third meeting of the EU-UK Joint Committee on 28 September 2020 that “[t]he Withdrawal Agreement is to be implemented, not to be renegotiated – let alone unilaterally changed, disregarded or disapplied.” (European Commission, 2020c).

The Withdrawal Agreement, decided on 17 October 2019 and entered into force with the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union on 1 February 2020, establishes the terms of the United Kingdom's orderly withdrawal from the EU, in accordance with Article 50 of the Treaty of the European Union. The Withdrawal Agreement comprises the agreement itself and a political declaration, with the former being composed of six parts and three protocols on issues such as financial matters, transition and separation as well as specific territories such as Northern Ireland, Ireland and Gibraltar. The Protocol was devised to ensure that, even if there was no UK–EU deal, there would be no physical border on the island of Ireland.

The second part of the Withdrawal Agreement is dedicated to citizens' rights and seeks to cover over three million EU citizens in the UK as well as over one million UK nationals in EU countries. It aims to ensure a free movement for EU citizens and UK nationals, as well as their family members insofar as that they can continue to live, work or study in their host country. The political declaration underlines in this regard that “[a]bove all, it should be a relationship that will work in the interests of citizens of the Union and the United Kingdom, now and in the future.” (European Council, 2019b). To that end, a specialised joint Committee on Citizens' Rights was established to monitor the implementation and application of the citizens' rights part of the agreement. To date (October 2020), the committee met three times (March, June, September 2020) and a fourth meeting is foreseen in October 2020. In the following, alongside the provisions on citizens' rights, selected cases shall be highlighted where citizens currently suffer from insufficient protection or where the agreement grants less beneficial rights than under current EU law.

### Personal scope

Following Brexit, British citizens lose their EU citizenship status and become third country nationals. The Withdrawal Agreement therefore addresses both UK nationals as third country nationals and EU citizens residing in the UK. It covers any person legally residing in either the UK or the EU-27 before the end of the transition period and allows family members to join that person in the future. Special provisions aim to protect children notwithstanding if they are born before or after the UK's withdrawal or in- or outside the host state of EU citizens or UK nationals. The agreement basically aims to allow EU citizens and UK nationals to continue to exercise their rights derived from

Union law in each other's territories for the rest of their lives, under the condition that "those rights are based on life choices made before the end of the transition period." (European Commission, 2020d). While such a wording explicitly considers mobile citizens possessing such status during the transition period, the situation of static citizens after the transition period and consequences deriving from it are not detailed in the current agreement.

### Residence rights and systems

It has been mentioned that free movement represents the cornerstone of EU citizenship provisions. The right to move and reside freely and its securement in a post-Brexit situation shall therefore benefit from special attention in the following. Concerning residence, the Withdrawal Agreement intends to maintain the substantive conditions of residence as those under current EU law on free movement. However, procedures differ between the UK and the EU-27. Member states are free to choose between a constitutive system with a mandatory application (such as for the UK's EU settlement scheme) or a declaratory system, where registration automatically confirms the rights in the Withdrawal Agreement. An EU website monitoring procedure to obtain a residence permit in the EU-27 for UK nationals reveals an almost equal share of both procedures across the EU, with a slight majority of 14 member states opting for the automatic procedure under the declaratory system. Although information is available in English, each EU member state has its own administration and procedures which UK citizens have to comply with. The European Commission aims to provide guidance by publishing and updating a list of residency systems, deadlines and information for all EU Member States. However, civil society organisations repeatedly reported detailed information from some member states being still lacking. Many EU member states have not yet started implementing the systems. On the one hand due to the uncertain future of EU-UK-relations, on the other caused by COVID-19 leading to severe delays and backlogs in the implementation process and treatment of applications. Given that processing applications takes longer than confirming status through a simple registration, citizens are worried their application will be treated before June 2021 (end of the transition period followed by a six months grace period) under the current circumstances. In this regard, some EU member states already showed openness towards a more flexible approach, namely a prolongation of the grace period beyond June 2021 in Member States with a constitutive system or prolongation of validity of residence documents issued under the EU free movement directive.

The Withdrawal Agreement also protects the rights of EU citizens who have moved to the UK before the end of the transition period. Under the constitutive system, all EU citizens except for Irish ones will be required to apply for settled status to continue living in the UK after 30 June 2021 and will be granted either pre-settled status (< 5 years of residence) or settled status (> 5 years residence). It has been reported that by July 2020,

some 3.8 million applications were made with 57 percent of applicants being granted settled status, 42 per cent pre-settled status and 2 per cent classed as refused, withdrawn, void or invalid (Woodcock, 2020). Such figures support assumptions by experts that the estimated number of 3 million EU citizens in the UK might hide a much higher number of unreported cases. After 30 June 2021, all EU citizens except for Irish willing to live or work in the UK need to qualify under the new migration regime, meaning the automatic right to enter the UK to live or work there, such as under the EU citizenship free movement provisions, is no longer valid. Moreover, the European Commission and advocacy groups expressed concerns about the new settlement scheme, fearing it would in practice lead to a "two-class-system" of residence in differentiating between pre-settled and settled status which gives access to different benefits.

### Further rights linked to free movement

The Withdrawal Agreement addresses further issues linked to free movement, such as social security rights, the situation of workers and self-employed persons as well as recognition of professional qualifications. Given that such provisions are less at the centre of the specific citizenship provisions discussed in the first part of this contribution, but still fall under the free movement (of services and people / workers) provisions, they shall be briefly addressed. Regarding social security issues, citizens will maintain their right to healthcare, pensions and other social security benefits if they find themselves in a cross-border situation involving an EU member state and the UK. If they are entitled to a cash benefit from one country, they may continue to receive it even if they live in another country.

On the rights of workers and self-employed persons, the Withdrawal Agreement foresees that every person falling under its scope will maintain the right to take up employment or to carry out an economic activity as a self-employed person and workers' rights based on EU law will be kept. This covers the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of nationality and the right to equal treatment compared to host state nationals in a professional environment. However, it does not go as far as the more general principle of non-discrimination and equality enshrined in Articles 18 and 19 TFEU. For frontier workers and self-employed persons, their rights are also protected in the country where they work. Furthermore, recognitions of professional qualifications in one country (either EU-27 or UK) remain valid and pending applications for recognition during the transition period will be processed according to the rules in place at the moment of application. To conclude, it is first of all crucial for both EU and UK citizens to move to their respective host country before the end of the transition period in order to fall under the scope of the Withdrawal Agreement, and to finish procedures by the end of the grace period in June 2021. Second, there are rights covered by EU citizenship such as democratic and political participation (Art. 22 & 24 TFEU) or diplomatic protection that are either not directly stemming from the EU's competencies or not relevant anymore for EU or UK citizens and therefore not contained in the Withdrawal Agreement. If relevant, bilateral

negotiations with every member state based on a system of reciprocity would be necessary to reintroduce some of those rights.

### **'No deal' scenario**

Shall trade talks between the European Union and the United Kingdom end without an agreement, it would be harder to ensure an equal level of citizens' rights. In a 'no deal' scenario, the default status for UK citizens would be that of a third country national immediately after the transition period. Future rights would be determined by national immigration law of the respective host country. The consequences for EU nationals who miss the June 2021 deadline to apply under the settlement scheme remain unclear and put them under a risk of insufficient protection (Menon, 2020). Uncertainty would also reign over questions falling within the range of social security, such as benefits, pensions and cross-border workers as well as the mutual recognition of professional qualifications which is key to access a foreign labour market. Concerning travel, even though both sides are likely to facilitate short-term business travel, UK citizens would have to comply with the immigration requirements for nationals of third countries, which could mean visas for brief business visits. Likewise, international driving permits and international health insurance might be required when travelling to the EU, and international roaming charges will apply if there is no specific bilateral agreement. For students, Erasmus+ funding will phase out, although the UK can in principle continue to participate as a third country – however highly unlikely in the event of a 'no deal'.

### **Civic mobilisation to secure citizens' rights**

In light of the above mentioned difficulties and uncertainties to uphold an equal level of protection as under EU law and especially citizenship provisions for UK nationals in Europe, various joint or individual initiatives explored possibilities to maintain the status of an EU citizen and the rights deriving from it. In general, an unprecedented increase in civil actions and cross-border mobilisation around Brexit, including European Citizens' Initiatives, can be observed since the Brexit referendum 2016.

### **Naturalisation: citizenship for lucky or privileged ones**

According to official numbers and success rates, the most straightforward solution to maintain a similar level of protection is to acquire the citizenship of one's host country or that of family members (i.e. spouses, grandparents). Many EU member states reported that with the end of the transition period approaching, demands for EU citizenship from British nationals increased significantly. Pan-European figures by the OECD showed an increase of 600% in British nationals acquiring another EU citizenship. In 2016, a sudden surge in applications for Irish passports resulted from some estimated six million British citizens eligible for dual citizenship, thanks to Irish ancestors or residence in Northern Ireland. Between January and September 2016, applications overall more than doubled, with 21,549 demands during the three



months after the referendum (Statista, 2016). Numbers on naturalisations of British citizens in Germany are another telling example out of many: After an annual average of 315 applications between 2000 and 2015, the number of successful applications reached 2,865 in 2016, more than doubled to 7,493 naturalisations the year after, before slightly dropping to 6,640 in 2018 and reaching its peak in 2019 with 14,600 UK citizens being granted German citizenship (Statista, 2020b). The vast majority of applicants have opted for dual citizenship by retaining their British citizenship, possible until 31 December 2020.

Another option, albeit more costly, is to acquire EU citizenship not by residence or family relations, but by financial means. The mechanisms of investor citizenship (“golden passport”) and residence schemes (“golden visa”) remains highly criticised as they “pose risks for the Member States and the Union as a whole, including in terms of security, money laundering, circumvention of EU rules and tax evasion” (European Commission, 2019, p. 23). While Bulgaria, Malta and Cyprus offer citizenship in exchange for investments ranging from 800,000 to 2 million Euros, a surprisingly high number of twenty EU member states offer residence schemes – with the exception of Belgium, Finland, Germany, Slovenia and Sweden (Nuspliger, 2019).

### Towards a new citizenship status?

Two political instruments part of the citizenship provisions were used to support the citizenship cause in the framework of Brexit: ECIs and the European Ombudsman. To date, four European Citizens’ Initiatives around Brexit were successfully registered since 2016, with most of them concentrating on the aspect of retaining EU citizenship for British nationals after Brexit. One ECI proposal suggested the separation of nationality and EU citizenship, arguing that Article 20 TFEU precludes national measures that deprive EU citizens of the genuine enjoyment of the rights conferred to them under their status as citizens of the Union (‘acquired rights’). Three other ECIs, demanding among others to “Stop Brexit” or asking for an “EU wide referendum whether the European Citizens want the United Kingdom to remain or to leave!” were refused registration because of falling outside the field of the EU’s competences (European Commission, 2018). Ultimately, none of the registered ECIs was successful in collecting a sufficient number of signatures, but nevertheless such initiatives interpret the civic interest and active use and defence of citizenship rights in recent years.

In 2017, a complaint was filed to the European Ombudsman for insufficient explanation on questions of EU citizenship for EU nationals by the European Commission, with the Ombudsman however confirming the Commission’s position on EU citizenship based on a country’s EU membership (European Ombudsman, 2018).

Also in Parliaments, shortly after the Brexit referendum, the idea of UK citizens being able to retain their EU citizenship status through a form of “associate(d) citizenship”

gained ground. Both the EU and UK Parliament have examined and intensively debated the matter (Austin-Greenall & Lipinska, 2018; Miller, 2018). The European Parliament in its AFCCO committee first examined the new concept in an own initiative draft report by the institution's Brexit coordinator Guy Verhofstadt in July 2016. The rationale behind it was to end with a variable geometry of opt-ins and opt-outs ("Europe à la carte") and to propose associate citizenship to peripheral states willing to participate only in certain EU policies. A later amendment to this report by Charles Goerens (DP, Renew Europe) explicitly suggested to grant citizens of former member states the possibility to keep free movement to live and work across the EU and to vote on European lists in European Parliament elections. The amendment was withdrawn before the vote on the report, but a motion for resolution on UK withdrawal in March 2017 acknowledged the high interest by British citizens to have their rights pursuant to Article 20 TFEU safeguarded. The final resolution invited "the EU-27 [to] examine how to mitigate this within the limits of EU primary law while fully respecting the principles of reciprocity, equity, symmetry and non-discrimination." (European Parliament, 2020). Bearing too much legal uncertainty, such as its non-reciprocal nature and personal scope, and requiring most probably a Treaty amendment according to experts (Kochenov & van den Brink, 2018), the proposal of EU associated citizenship was finally not retained.

### Advocacy groups

Albeit the effort EU and UK officials have put into finding a consensus on their future relations, different organisations representing citizens' groups who are particularly affected by Brexit called for further progress to ensure all EU citizens in the UK and vice versa are able to effectively exercise their rights after the transition.

Among various local groups representing mobile citizens most at risk of a loss or downgrading of citizens' rights following Brexit, two key stakeholders shall be highlighted here: "British in Europe", representing UK nationals in the EU, and "the3million", representing EU citizens in the UK.<sup>1</sup> During the negotiations on future relations of the United Kingdom and the European Union, both groups pointed out various shortcomings and potential dangers deriving from the draft agreements in order to ensure the best level of protection for the respective citizens abroad. In addition, they also highlighted matters that are not covered by the Withdrawal Agreement, because they do not stem from the Union's competences (i.e. local voting rights). Both "British in Europe" and "the3million" were invited to share their observations as external representatives during the meetings of the Specialised Committee on Citizens' Right between the EU and the UK.

"the3million" was founded in the aftermath of the referendum by European nationals in the UK and operates at the intersection of advocacy and research. In cooperation with academia and political representatives, the organisation provides a number of position

<sup>1</sup><https://www.the3million.org.uk>

papers, briefings and webinars to advocate for and inform about citizens' rights. Among the highlighted shortcomings by "the3million" in the current agreement figures the need for a physical document proving settled status for EU citizens, who already struggle with current digital-only settlement schemes at airports or while moving due to a lack of physical proof of residence (Bulman, 2020). Further points raised by the activists include political participation and representation of EU citizens after 2021, namely the possibility to vote and stand in local elections. Although the local-level democratic rights of EU citizens in the UK have been confirmed for the 2021 local elections, bilateral negotiations with each EU member state are needed to decide the continuation of these rights in the future and with it a growing danger of unequal treatment of EU citizens in the UK. Moreover, "the3million" expressed deep concern over the matter of dual nationality which is not recognized by all EU member states and would therefore entail a loss of citizenship in some cases. Further concerns are related to economically inactive persons (i.e. students, pensioners or jobseekers) who have not secured settled status by the end of the transition period, might even be abroad due to mobility restrictions, and who might fail to be considered lawfully resident in the UK due to a lack of private health insurance. This only adds to the problems that especially young European and British citizens will face after Brexit; other than Erasmus+ programmes and related funding running out under the current Multiannual Financial Framework and extensions being subject to further negotiations as well as possible higher tuition fees for third country nationals.

"British in Europe" is the largest coalition group of British nationals living and working across the EU, with important local groups being established in Spain and France, among others. As for "the3million", the activists accompanied the negotiations by advocacy and information for both stakeholders and citizens. Main points of concern specific to British citizens include questions of residence and free movement across the EU after the transition period. The campaigners argue that a residence permit for one EU country would still represent a downgrading of current free movement rights as it does not cover onward mobility within the EU for the purpose of work and study. Further points of criticism raised include the implementation timeline and application deadline of the constitutive residence scheme across Member States and information available to citizens.

It becomes apparent from the foregoing that input from external representatives and advocacy groups for citizens' rights related to Brexit is particularly valuable. On the one hand for addressing shortcomings of the Withdrawal Agreement, on the other for covering matters that do not fall under the agreement or the EU's competences. Nevertheless, the unprecedented pan-European mobilisation of European civil society through transnational cooperation and networking for a common goal is certainly one of the (very) few positive consequences of the Brexit referendum; together with an enhanced political dialogue at all levels, more transparency and a unified EU position towards the UK.

## Conclusion

At the time of writing, the United Kingdom and the European Union finished their last formal round of talks on their future relationship at the beginning of October 2020. The transition period entered its final quarter and yet the future of citizens' rights seems far from being sealed. The implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement, the fruit of three years of joint negotiations across the Channel, is uncertain and the 'no deal' scenario not an unlikely option. This hampers not only future bilateral relations with the first former member state of the EU, but also confidence in the EU as a political system and its core idea of free movement and a single market.

In the first part of this contribution, the rich armoury of rights conferred to EU citizens under the citizenship provisions underlined that European citizenship is far more than free movement, but also testimony of a political and cultural European project. In the course of European integration, the European institutions and in particular the European Court of Justice had their stake in further defining and sometimes stretching citizens' rights. A closer look was taken at specific groups of mobile citizens, British nationals in the EU and European citizens in the United Kingdom, which are most at risk of a downgrading or loss of their rights. A comparison revealed a significant difference in expats' profiles in terms of age and geography; as well as an identification as European citizens of only a slight majority of UK nationals which is far beyond the European average. In the second part on political and civic answers to the Brexit referendum, a comparison of the rights foreseen under the Withdrawal Agreement with the EU citizenship provisions came to the conclusion that albeit joint efforts by EU and UK representatives to ensure an equal level of protection for mobile citizens joining their host country before the end of the transition period, a number of important questions remain unaddressed. It has been briefly highlighted that especially the economically inactive might find themselves exposed to insufficient protection, as well as static citizens willing to exercise their mobility rights after the transition period. The initial assumption that citizens' rights occupy a minor place in negotiations can only be regarded as partially valid, with EU institutions having increasingly strengthened the importance of citizens' rights, providing help and information and finally the appointment of a specialised EU-UK Committee on Citizens' Rights.

The overview of various civic initiatives either through political representatives in the European Parliament or instruments for political participation underlined once more the important role of external representatives in such a highly political and politicised process. Especially civic interest groups such as "British in Europe" or "the3million" born in the aftermath of the referendum as well as ECI organisers provide input by channeling opinions and insights of citizens and experts across borders, by networking and informing and finally advocating for the best level of protection for citizens. Concerns raised by citizens' groups are the expression of an imperfect Withdrawal Agreement in the eyes of

some, yet it would still provide a higher level of protection and certainty to citizens than a ‘no deal’ scenario.

From UK expat to Post-European, from EU expat relying on free movement to EU expat residing in a third country without being consulted. Many citizens have built their personal and professional lives around the idea of free movement: students, healthcare and construction workers, teachers and self-employed in various sectors as well as pensioners, only to name a few examples. All of them are, in one way or another, affected by Brexit. Taking a closer look at citizens’ rights and if and how they can be upheld in a post-Brexit scenario only gives the glimpse of an idea about the complexity of negotiations about the future EU-UK-relationships in various areas and the degree to which European integration has led to ever greater cooperation across the EU in the last 60 years.

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## Nils Erik Forsgård: **DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENT – THREAT OR OPPORTUNITY?**

### An ageing Europe

Europe is nowadays spoken of more loudly and more frequently as an ageing continent. But already as early as autumn 2014, Pope Francis described Europe in a speech as “a tired grandmother who is no longer fertile” (Guida, 2014). The formulation was crude and rhetorically excessive, but still very truthful. If we opt for a slightly more neutral wording, we can say the following about all the current EU member states: the birth rate is falling and the proportion of elderly people is rising. The equation is challenging and even very difficult. It is also economically, politically and culturally explosive.

The demographic situation in Finland is considered particularly problematic. The birth rate is dropping and the population is ageing – what is more, very quickly. From the peak of 1947, the number of children born has more than halved, standing in 2020 at just under 46,000. The number of new-born babies was at about the same level during the difficult famine years at the end of the 1860s. The difference is that Finland in 1947 only had a population of 1.7 million. Today it stands at almost 5,6 million (“Finland Demographics 2020 (Population, Age, Sex, Trends) - Worldometer”, 2020).

If we look further south in Europe, we see that Germany is ageing at least just as quickly, and that the forecasts are for a decline in the country’s population from 82 million to 75 million by 2050. By then, the average age in Germany will be 50 years. In the foreseeable future, the UK will have bypassed Germany as the most populous country in Europe, with France in second place. In Germany, the working-age population will decrease by a tenth in the next fifteen years, while the share of pensioners will grow by almost 20 million by 2040 (“Germany Population (2020) - Worldometer”, 2020).

Nine of the ten fastest-shrinking nations are in eastern Europe. They are home to low birth rates combined with high emigration, primarily of the young. The most challenging situation is in Bulgaria and Latvia, both of which the UN predicts will lose a quarter of their respective population by 2050 (“Population trends 1950 – 2100: globally and within Europe”, 2020).

Today, approximately one in five Europeans is older than 65. In thirty years, one in three is predicted to be. Immigrants and refugees have so far contributed to keeping the average age down. The collective average age in Europe is 43, but among immigrants and refugees it is approximately 35.

## Medianålder i olika EU-länder 2018

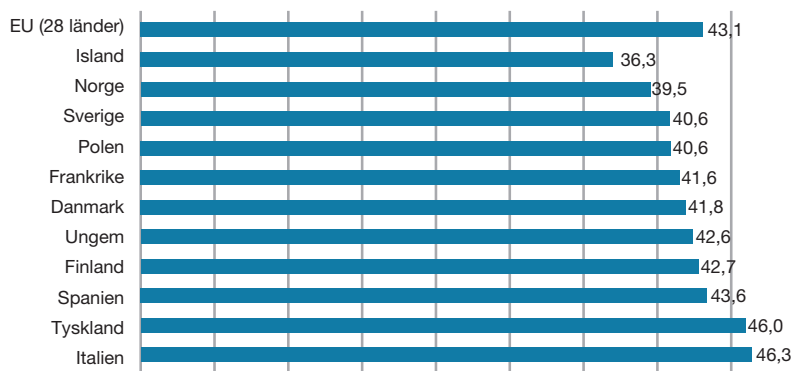


Figure 1 Average age of populations in various EU member states in 2018

Source: Eurostat

We can of course turn the problem on its head and say that an ageing European population is a good sign, one of progress. Previous European generations never had the chance to grow truly old. They could not do so because of war, poor hygiene and food shortages. Now the situation is different. The European project since the Second World War has been very successful in this regard. Europe got peace and Europeans got to grow old. Life expectancy in most European countries today for both men and women is close to, around or just over 80. In Finland, life expectancy has grown from around 60 at the start of the 1950s to around 80 today ("Finland Demographics 2020 (Population, Age, Sex, Trends) - Worldometer", 2020). It has thus doubled since the end of the nineteenth century. A large, ageing cohort of Europeans is also a potential goldmine for businesses. A "silver economy" is often spoken of today to illustrate the opportunities. A study presented by the European Commission estimates the size of the silver economy (defined as the total sum spent on goods and services by people over 50) at €3,700 billion, a sum expected to grow to at least €6,700 billion by 2025 ("Silver Economy Study: How to stimulate the economy by hundreds of millions of Euros per year – Shaping Europe's digital future – European Commission", 2020).

When it comes to life expectancy there are regional differences in countries and there are differences between Western countries. In the US, men's life expectancy is stagnating and women's is slightly falling. The trend appears similar in the UK. There are clear socio-economic factors, or divides, in the background. A recent study in *The Journal of Gerontology* showed that "wealthy" and "rich" Britons and Americans do not just live longer: they live, on average, seven to nine years longer without chronic, disabling or otherwise difficult diseases (Hill, 2020).

The (western) European successes in life expectancy are rooted in a quest for social equity, relative gender equality, a focus on human rights, a growing awareness of ecological realities and in labour market policy solutions. Sociologists (and demographers) speak of a European postmodernism that does not exclusively focus on consumption, but also on happiness, welfare and solidarity.

## Trends in population development

The generally negative population development in Europe partially fits the global picture. The United Nations' World Population Prospects show that 27 countries have a smaller population now than in 2010 and that a further 55 countries will see their populations fall by 2050 ("World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations", 2019). China is one of these countries.

The world's total population is no longer growing as quickly as it once was. It is not just Europe, but also eastern Asia, all of North America, and many large countries such as Brazil and Iran which are displaying falling fertility and birth rates. Without immigration, all these regions and countries would experience annual population decline. The UN's forecasts today speak of a halt in population increase occurring around 2100. After that, the world's population will start to decrease again. We can already state this: with the exception of Africa and the world's 500 largest cities, the world is currently experiencing a net population loss.

The world's global population growth has looked approximately as follows since the start of the twentieth century:

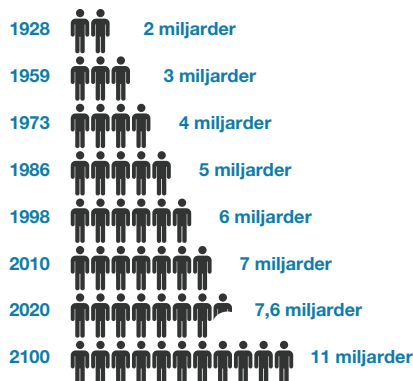


Figure 2 Development of the world's population and forecast for 2100

Source: UN, Die Zeit

Developments can also be described in the following manner. It took humanity 128 years to grow from one to two billion. The next billion increase in population took 31 years. The third increase of a billion took 14 years and the next two increases of a billion took 13 and 12 years, respectively. And so on, and more quickly. However, from the present, the increase will slow down again. Now, forecasts say that it will take humanity 13 years to reach 8 billion, 14 years to reach 9 billion, and so on, with ever longer intervals than before. However, this naturally depends on many factors, including ones which cannot yet be taken into account, such as war, epidemics, climate change and famine.

Africa today can be described as a mirror image of Europe in the nineteenth century. Europe, led by the United Kingdom, was the first continent to manage to escape the demographic stagnation characterized by high birth rates and high mortality. With time, the high mortality fell, while birth rates remained high. The same demographic transformation is taking place in Africa now. That means that a high birth rate is coupled with decreasing infant mortality and growing populations.

Staying in Europe, we can see that there are differences between countries. For example, the population decrease in Spain and Bulgaria is high. In several Nordic countries it is relatively slow, but still constant ("World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations", 2019). The Spanish government realized the gravity of the demographic situation a few years ago. Edelmira Barreira Diz was given the task of focusing exclusively on the demographic challenge. She was popularly known as the 'sex tsar'. She developed a strategy for higher birth rates. The result was and is insignificant. In many European countries, the population decline is based on emigration, both present and historic. The US is home to seven times more Irish people than the island of Ireland. In other countries, the population decline is due to low education levels and poor nutrition. The life expectancy of a man in Glasgow in Scotland is lower than that of a man in the Gaza Strip.

The average European woman now gives birth to just under 1.6 children ("World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations", 2019). That is below the replacement level of just over two children (2.1) per woman. That is the number of children that need to be born in a given period to maintain the population. France is an exception here, as is Sweden, even if Sweden, too, displays slightly decreasing fertility. The situation in Italy is particularly problematic. There are twice as many deaths as births and almost a quarter of all Italians are over 65 ("World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations", 2019). Approximately one in ten Italians live in another country, and in the rapidly growing cohort of emigrants, including people from the well-off northern provinces and cities, more and more have a university education. However, the Italian situation did not arise overnight. The trend towards falling birth rates, emigration and ageing was visible in the early 1990s, in the wake of an economic recession, and has (despite relatively recent signs of a rising birth rate) since then only accelerated.

## Fruktksamhetstal i olika EU-länder 2018

Barn per kvinna

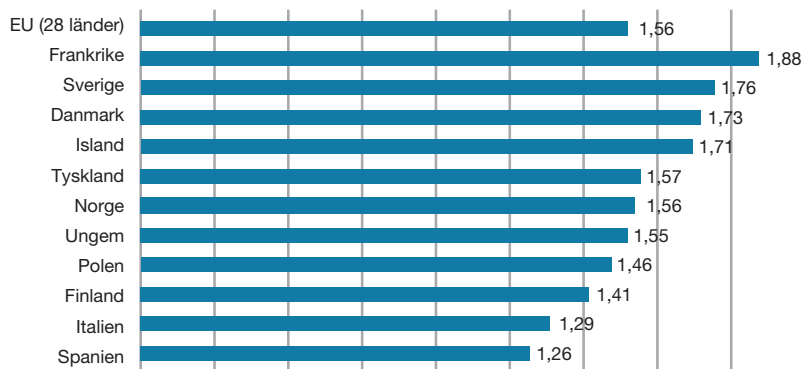


Figure 3 Childbearing in various EU member states in 2018

Source: Eurostat

It is easy to see the problem in all of this, but significantly more difficult to find solutions. The solutions presented so far have tended to focus on family policy incentives. In Russia, the authorities have taken economic measures to promote fertility. For each child born, the mother or family can receive a one-off payment of anything between €6,745 and €9,000 ("World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations", 2019). In Hungary, the Orbán regime has introduced state incentives to boost fertility. Women who give birth to their third child are granted a loan that does not need to be repaid. Additionally, women who have a fourth child are exempted from income tax for the rest of their lives ("World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations", 2019). In Germany, the fertility rate has increased slightly from 1.55 to 1.57 thanks to the immigration wave of 2015, but also because of dedicated state investment in childcare and parental leave. In Berlin, for example, this means that childcare is free of charge for all children ("World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations", 2019). The demographic question has received increased political weight in recent years. There is, for instance, a European Commissioner whose portfolio includes responsibility for demographic questions.

Everywhere in the EU, people are moving to cities and leaving the countryside, dying societies and villages. The Austrian capital Vienna has in recent years become younger as the rest of the country has aged rapidly. The pattern is the same elsewhere, too. From the national regional perspective, the demographic question is of an almost destabilizing nature. One of its many potential consequences is stagnating or falling property prices in depopulated cities and regions which lack growth and attractiveness. From a national security and defence perspective the demographic question also has an erosive quality.

How can for instance Finland maintain the same levels of military service if there are no longer any young men?

The demographic question has become a part of the discussion around democracy, not least due to the fact that it is numbers that decide the most in our Western democracies. On a more general level, we can state that questions of demographics and migration have been significant for the populist movements and parties that have grown around the world. The current populist trend is fed by more or less explicit questioning of the population's ethnocultural makeup. It is migration which has almost everywhere given birth to and nurtured populism. Populist parties tend to do best in regions and smaller cities with falling populations or which are threatened by falling population, and which witness high unemployment and stagnating or vanishing economic prospects. Among rising feelings of exclusion, protests and uprisings grow (Krakovsky 2019). When the UK voted in 2016 on its future relationship with the EU, well over 80% of constituencies in the large cities, including London, voted to remain in the bloc. In rural, depopulated areas, 87% of constituencies voted to leave the EU ("EU Referendum Results", 2020).

## A demographic modernization

How should the demographic development in Europe be approached or analysed? Among professional demographers, there is considerably less, or more balanced, pessimism than on tabloid newspapers' alarmist opinion and news pages. This is partly explained by the fact that demographers rarely speak the language of economists or politicians – and vice versa. It is also only in the past few years, in the aftermath of a difficult financial crisis, that the demographic question landed on the agenda and at the same time developed into a question of democracy. How, then, should the layman assess questions of birth rate, mortality and migration? There is no simple or safe way of doing so. Most demographic studies available today focus on one or two of these elements – but rarely or never on all three at once.

The current economic reasoning in demographic questions reflects, in all essentiality, the thoughts and positions which John Maynard Keynes formulated in an essay in 1937. The departure point for Keynes in "Some Economic Consequences of a Declining Population" was to show that a declining population comes with difficult economic side effects, particularly in the form of unemployment. In his essay, Keynes tried to show that population decline leads to lower investments from businesses, which in turn leads to lower demand and increased unemployment. The solution he gave for stable population development and sustained welfare was increased consumption with the help of more equal income distribution and low interest rates. In Europe in 2020 it remains to be seen what effect low rates actually have on consumption and, yes, perhaps for that matter on birth rates, too (Keynes 1937).

Population Europe's headquarters are in central Berlin. Vono de Vilhena<sup>2</sup> is keen to point out the large degree of complexity in demographic research (2018). She says that the forecasts being made in Europe and individual countries are based on mathematical models and that they reflect the competence we currently have. She also notes that there are few experts on population forecasts in the area of demographic research. This is not least due to the fact that demographic questions and thus population predictions are most often linked to national statistics offices. Daniela Vono de Vilhena says that the migration question has gained a greater significance than before and that it is a rapidly growing research field. The problem hitherto has been a lack of good data, but the access to data is growing, leading to the questions being posed changing. Naturally, the answers are also changing. However, there are a lot of elements of uncertainty around migration. Demographers, quite simply, work with quantifying the uncertainty element.

Daniela Vono de Vilhena says that the demographic development in Europe in the past century, generally speaking, has been very slow, with small changes ("Population Decline and Its Effects in Europe", 2020). For her, as a demographer, the current situation in Europe represents a "demographic modernization". This means that we are both ageing and staying healthy. It also means that women can choose whether to give birth and raise a family, or to study and work, or both. The population in today's Europe, in other words, reflects a form of maximum modernization of the human race. Vono de Vilhena's message is, therefore, that an excessively strong focus on future increases in fertility is wasted time and energy. Individuals and families must be given the opportunity to realize their dreams and visions, she says, but to hope for a revolution in birth rates is just a waste of time. However, she says that it is important for individual countries to prepare themselves for the near future by investing in a solid, pragmatic migration policy.

"We know that young eastern Europeans are leaving their countries in large numbers. They want to have children, but they have those children abroad. The problem is that politicians are not thinking of returning emigrants or immigration. Instead, look at Ireland. At one stage the country was haemorrhaging large numbers of inhabitants, but at the same time the politicians realized they had to create an effective immigration policy. If we look at Ireland today we see a country with one of the highest fertility rates in Europe."

After our conversation, Vono de Vilhena sends several links to scientific articles about happiness and adolescence in Europe. She sees a growing demographic problem in the fact that so many young adults, particularly in southern parts of Europe, still live at home with their parents for a very long time and thus put off becoming adults ("Population Decline and Its Effects in Europe", 2020).

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<sup>2</sup> Daniela Vono de Vilhena is a Senior Demographer and scientific coordinator at Population Europe. That is a network for a number of demographic research institutes across Europe, financed by the EU and connected to the Max-Planck-Institut

“To give birth and become a parent is actually the end situation in a long development of becoming an adult. One of my big goals in life with my own children is, therefore, for them to leave home when they’re 18,” says Vono de Vilhena with a serious smile.

## The situation in Finland – not entirely hopeless

Alongside South Korea, Japan and Germany, the population in Finland is ageing the fastest in the world. The forecasts speak of a population which is now slowly growing thanks to immigration, but which will start to shrink at some point in the 2030s. Or perhaps a little later. It all seems to depend on what questions and scenarios are posed, which data is chosen, and, not least, how we imagine the development of immigration.

According to calculations done by the Regional Council of Southwest Finland, the number of working-age individuals will shrink by 70,000 in the next ten years, while the number of pensioners will increase by 256,000 (Varsinais-Suomen Liitoo 2019). That will put pressure on municipalities and their services and, in the long run, on the entire welfare state. At the same time, economists see dark clouds gathering. As reported in the Regional Council of Southwest Finland’s study, slowing population growth can have consequences not only for productivity, but also for companies’ investments. Japan is pointed out as a particularly negative case. The economic decline in Japan began at around the same time as the working age population began to shrink.

According to the Finnish credit institute Hypo, the lopsided population pyramid in Finland is already significantly affecting economic growth (Teivainen, 2020). An analysis by the Regional Council of Southwest Finland shows that the need for new employees in senior care will grow to 18,000 by 2030. Using the same logic, 12,000 fewer employees will be needed in nursery schools and primary education. The Finland Chamber of Commerce in Helsinki in turn believes that a pension reform will become inevitable, given that Finland has ever more older people, fewer children and not enough immigration (Keskuskauppakamarin Sote-Linja 2020). The share of immigrants or ‘new Finns’ is less than 10% of the total population, a number that is comparable to the situation in many eastern European countries. In Sweden, the share of immigrants is around 20%, in Iceland and Norway about 16 % and in Denmark 12%.

The Finnish problem can also be expressed as follows: at the turn of the millennium the share of inhabitants aged over 85 constituted approximately 1.5% of the total Finnish population. The forecasts for 2070 are for closer to 10%. The share of residents of Espoo (in the south) aged over 75 is increasing by five per cent every year. These are hard facts which represent difficult realities in terms of care policy. The Finnish fertility rate (children born to each woman) was 1.83 in 2010. Now, it is approximately 1.35. In the larger cities (and, then, among native Finnish women) it is



even lower, around 1.2. The underlying question is, of course, whether we are talking about a temporary or permanent trend (Varsinais-Suomen Liitoo 2019).

Wolfgang Lutz is a statistics professor at the University of Vienna and founding director of the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital. Lutz is also involved in countless other research-based projects and institutions. His career has included work and research in Helsinki. He has also written about the demographic development of Finland, not least from a historical perspective. Lutz and his colleagues are also the people behind one of the central theses in demographic research today. This is the “low fertility trap hypothesis” (Lutz et al. 2006). This hypothesis states approximately that low fertility in one generation tends to spread to the next, and so on, in a downward spiral. One of the key issues in this context seems to be whether a couple that is planning marriage or children believes it is able to fulfil its material dreams.

Lutz says that in the past 300 years Finland has experienced a natural population growth that has only been interrupted by events such as war, famine and epidemics. After the famine years of 1867 and 1868, mortality in Finland started to fall in a more constant and consistent fashion. The declining trend has hitherto only been broken by the two wars in the twentieth century, the Civil War of 1918 and the concurrent Spanish influenza pandemic. Around 1950 mortality fell even further thanks to the introduction of antibiotics and improvements in public healthcare. A clear drop in the curves can also be seen in the 1960s and 1970s, when there was high emigration to countries such as Sweden. Between 1750 and 1950, Lutz summarizes, the Finnish population doubled every fifty years, from 422,000 in 1750 to 5,518,000 in 2018.

In 2020, Lutz says that the situation in Finland is a little precarious but in no way hopeless (Gabrielsen 2017). He notes that in 1865 the cohort of children aged under 14 made up approximately a third of the total population, whereas the share of over-65s was barely five per cent. Today (2018), those figures are 16% and 21.8%, respectively. However, in the same breath Lutz turns the problem on its head and says that a lower share of children is a good thing, given the future employment rate. In a high-tech society there are not going to be enough jobs for everyone, and in families with at most two children parents will also be able to focus more energy and care on individual children. The consequence is a closer network and higher solidarity, which is good for the welfare state in the long run, Lutz says.

“We have made calculations and come to the conclusion that a fertility rate between 1.5 and 1.7 is optimal,” Lutz says. “In that case, the population will shrink slowly and benignly. The only problem with this is an outdated nationalist ideology which compares nations and the size of their populations with each other. This entire way of thinking is based in a demographic decline in France during the Enlightenment

and after the French Revolution. The Revolution led to female emancipation, higher educational attainment and lower birth rates. At the same time, France's arch-enemy Prussia was showing significant population growth. Then Napoleon came on the scene and conquered Europe with the help of armies filled with young men. After the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, the French drew the conclusion that the country's fertility was far too low in comparison with Prussia, where it was very high at the time. The French have since then focused almost obsessively on population growth. And France still has the most pro-natalist policy in the world. It's only today that we're realizing that it's not really about the number of children in a country, but rather their education level and skills" (Gabrielsen 2017).

The key word in Lutz's demographic reasoning is education. He says that it is unacceptable that many young men in Europe today can barely read. Illiteracy is not a good preparation for a labour market with ever fewer manual jobs. Lutz sees possibilities here, too, despite falling birth rates. He points to the large parts of Europe where many women are still not participating in the labour market and thus form a large pool of potential workers. But the basic logic in his reasoning is also as follows: falling fertility is a good preparation for the future job market, characterized as it will be by high-tech solutions and artificial intelligence. Lutz is not alone in thinking in this way. In fact, among European demographers we can detect the outlines of an entire social philosophy with almost elite notes. This philosophy may be summarized as: a small but highly educated population is better than a large and uneducated population.

Wolfgang Lutz's reasoning on women and the labour market receives both direct and indirect support from researchers at the German Federal Institute for Population Research ("3,5 Millionen Pflegebedürftige im Jahr 2030", 2020). The Institute calculates that in 2030 approximately half a million more Germans will retire than will enter the labour market. While German economists speak about the need for a strong increase in labour-force immigration, demographers note that 73% of German women today are active in the labour market. As late as 2004, this figure was 59%. A consequence of this is that there have never been so many people in the labour market as today, that is, circa 45 million. According to the Institute, to close the large gap that will open when the baby boomer generation retires in the next decade, this same positive development needs to continue and the share of older people in working life needs to remain high. In other words: it is women and older people who will keep the welfare state running in the future. In this demographic context, there appears to be an unspoken tension or contrast between the need for immigrants of working age and purely "domestic" solutions through high participation in the labour market. According to the OECD, in Europe as a whole the share of employees aged 50–64-year-olds rose in total by 20% between 2008 and 2018 ("Population and employment by main activity", 2020).

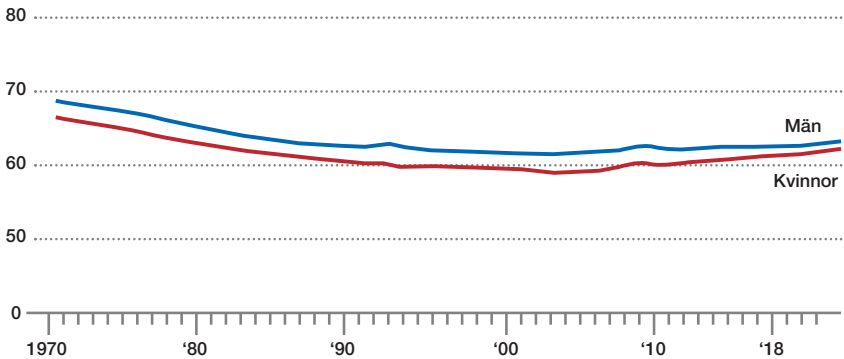


Figure 4 Average pension age in the EU, 1970–2018

Source: OECD, Süddeutsche Zeitung

Wolfgang Lutz is generally regarded as Europe's leading demographer. His optimistic arguments are echoed in countless scientific arguments and discussions of population questions. Lutz says that in a few generations, the whole world will have a fertility rate at around the same level as Europe today. He says that this will be good for the climate and resources. Lutz points out that the falling birth rate in the USA is due to better family planning and the fact that the proportion of unplanned and teenage pregnancies has fallen significantly in the last decade. Generally, Lutz is less pessimistic than the UN's population forecasts. Lutz says that the world's population will not rise to much more than nine billion before it begins to fall again. He also believes that this maximum level will be reached as early as 2070, not 2100. And when it begins to drop, Lutz says, it will finally land at about the same level as today, that is, somewhere between seven and eight billion. Or perhaps even three to four billion with a fertility rate of 1.5 to 1.7. However, nobody knows for certain.

## Rising labour shortage

Before the corona-pandemic hit the world in the spring of 2020 many businesses in the Ostrobothnia-region (the west coast) in Finland had noted a rising labour shortage ("Finland Demographics 2020 (Population, Age, Sex, Trends) - Worldometer", 2020). Approximately half of businesses had problems recruiting competent staff. Cooks, welders, electrical engineers, builders, gardeners, nurses and cleaners were needed. Of the 50,000 job vacancies in Finland at the end of 2019, more than half were considered hard to fill. In the aftermath of the first wave of the pandemic the unemployment numbers in Finland are currently rising rapidly.

On a pan-European level, however, Hungary is a perhaps more illustrative case in point. Unemployment in Hungary is between three and four per cent (2019) and the economy is growing fast, by over five per cent a year. In the short term, everything looks good. However, the future perspective is problematic. Over 90% of all industries in Hungary report labour shortages and there are approximately 80,000 vacant positions. However, Hungary's borders are in principle closed to all but white people with Christian roots. Many Hungarians have moved abroad in search of a better life. Approximately 350,000 Hungarians are calculated to live abroad permanently, which equates to 5% of the labour force. The birth rate in Hungary is at the same level as in Finland, approximately 1.4 ("Population Decline and Its Effects in Europe", 2020).

The Orbán regime has tried to solve the labour shortage by passing a law popularly known by some as 'the Slave Act' ("Hungary president signs controversial 'slave law'", 2020). Every employer can require an employee to work 400 hours' overtime annually, for which it can pay the employee over a period of three years. The overtime act has not been met with joyous reactions from the people. The Finnish response to the same problem has so far been increased to the retirement age. Talk of a high pension age can partially conceal, one can suspect, a xenophobic dimension. In other words: we would rather work to the grave than fill job vacancies with foreign (non-Christian) workers.

A 2011 study by Jan Saarela for think tank Magma in Helsinki on the economic consequence of immigration showed that immigration often contributes positively to the economy of a society (Saarela 2011). Immigration primarily has long-term consequences and benefits. Saarela demonstrated that the short-term consequences of immigration can be negative and burden the social security system. However, an ageing population and the will to maintain a comprehensive welfare system requires higher immigration in the future.

The biggest problem for immigrants to Finland is the difficulty of entering the labour market. The situation is particularly tough for immigrant women. Integration should not occur via attractive salaries, but rather salaries for work in general. To illustrate this problem, we can look at the case of Israel. Since the foundation of the state in 1948, over 3 million Jews have left their homelands for Israel. Over 1 million emigrated from the former USSR. Many have also come from countries such as Ethiopia and Yemen. The flows were highest in the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Jews who emigrated from the Soviet Union to Israel at the start of the 1990s did not speak Hebrew, knew nothing about the Western capitalist system and moved for political reasons, not primarily as jobseekers. In just two years the working-age population of Israel grew by over 8%, and in seven years by 15%. If these figures were converted for the Europe of today, that would mean a wave of immigration from, say, Africa of over 50 million people.

And what happened? At the end of the 1990s, unemployment in Israel had dropped and salary levels were stable, that is, on the same level as before. This shows well how the labour market is not a zero-sum game. Rather, new jobs are created where new people live, and the local and national economy are stimulated by newcomers who eat food prepared by others, sleep in flats owned by others and buy clothes in shops owned by others.

## Growing diversity in the Helsinki region

Today, Helsinki has approximately 650,000 inhabitants. The forecasts for 2050 are for 822,000, even if the trends in the last three years have been people moving to neighbouring municipalities and, yes, lower fertility. Helsinki today is home to around 100,000 residents with a foreign background. Just under a fifth of these people were born in Finland. This means they are second-generation immigrants. The largest immigrant groups come from Russia, Estonia and Somalia. The Russian-speaking population group is growing constantly. Russia is a neighbouring country.

The number of children who speak a foreign language has grown quickly. One in five children of pre-school age today speaks another language than Finnish, Swedish or Saami. In just five years, that will be approximately one in four children, by 2035 one in three. However, the differences between urban areas are stark. Whereas 98% of children in Länsi-Pakila speak an official language of Finland the corresponding figure in Kallaahti is 44%. If we compare the three large southern cities (Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa) to each other, we see that at the turn of the millennium just 4% of Vantaa residents spoke a foreign language, whereas by 2018 that figure was almost 19%. A similar development has occurred in Helsinki and Espoo – from 5.4% to almost 14 % in Helsinki. A problematic aspect of this development is that Finns tend to move away from areas with a lot of, or, likely today, a majority of immigrants ("Finland Demographics 2020 (Population, Age, Sex, Trends) – Worldometer", 2020).

The growth in population in Finland today is primarily occurring in the Helsinki region. More than 40% of all annual growth (also economic) is concentrated in the three large southern cities. Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa have on average grown by a combined total 12,000 people annually in recent years. In 2018 the figure was 14,500, divided equally between the three cities. The growth is primarily due to immigration, including domestic migration. Of the 4,700 new arrivals to Helsinki in 2018, the majority were born outside Finland. The share of residents speaking a language other than Finnish, Swedish or Saami in Espoo will increase tenfold in the next thirty years. The share of foreign-born residents in Helsinki will reach a quarter by 2030.

In all Western societies, urbanization means an inevitable liberalization of lifestyles, customs and traditions. Issues related to immigration will soon be accompanied by

other burning issues. How can the vulnerable European middle class manage the likes of the growth of AI and robotized solutions in future? In search of a context, we may ask the following question. Is it a coincidence that demographic decline and large migration appear to go hand in hand with the OECD's forecasts of the southern and western regions of Europe being hardest hit by automation and developments in AI (OECD 2020a)?

The key word in this context appears to be high(er) education. The lower the level of education, the higher the risk of being negatively affected by automation through fewer manual jobs. The OECD predicts that 40% of all jobs in western Slovakia are under threat in the foreseeable future. The equivalent figure for the Oslo region is 4%. At the same time, the demographic forecasts for Slovakia are for a population decline of half a million by 2050. The forecasts for Norway are precisely the opposite – the UN estimates the country will have a population of 6.5 million by 2050 ("Human Development Reports", 2020). The figures may be imprecise or exaggerated, but the processes seem somewhat clear.

## Nordic developments

The demographic development in Finland and the Nordic countries is part of a global trend. The Nordic countries have, at quite an impressive speed, turned into immigration societies. A study from the OECD shows that international migration to and from industrialized countries has grown strongly this millennium. Above all, migration of the highly educated (35%) has grown quickly. In 2000/2001 around 78 million migrants lived in one of the 36 OECD member countries. Fifteen years later the number had grown to 120 million. That is an increase of 55%. The largest share of migrants was in the USA, with 46 million, followed by Germany with 12 million. For Germany, this meant a doubling of the percentage of migrants since 2000. For the USA, the share of legal migrants of the entire population grew from almost 5% in 1960 to 14% in 2016. In the same period, migration from China and India, above all, to other countries has grown very quickly (OECD 2020b).

The outflow of the highly educated primarily presents a problem for countries in Central America, the Caribbean and Africa. More than 40% of the highly educated in these countries emigrate. In Guyana, this share is over 70%. A recent Afrobarometer survey shows that 40% of all Africans would like to leave their homelands (Appiah-Nyamekye & Selormey, 2020). Emigration from Africa to OECD countries in this millennium has grown from 7.2 million to 12.5 million. For now, however, the authors of the OECD report note, emigration from Africa forms a relatively small part of global migration – it is small compared to the fast population growth on the continent.

During the first two decades of the 21st century immigration has been the main driving demographic force in the Nordics. Viewed more broadly, the Nordic countries also have

something else in common. Both uneducated and highly educated women give birth to the same number of children. In this respect, the Nordic countries are different to the rest of Europe, where women with low levels of education give birth to more children than highly educated women. The largest difference between Finland and the other Nordic countries, however, appears to be childlessness, both voluntary and involuntary. More than one in five women in Finland born at the beginning of the 1970s is childless. In the other Nordic countries, the figure is between 12 and 14 per cent.

In the Nordic countries, it is currently only the Faroe Islands that are reaching the so called replacement level. Between 1990 and 2019 the population increased by over 40% in Iceland, 26% in Norway and 11% in Finland.

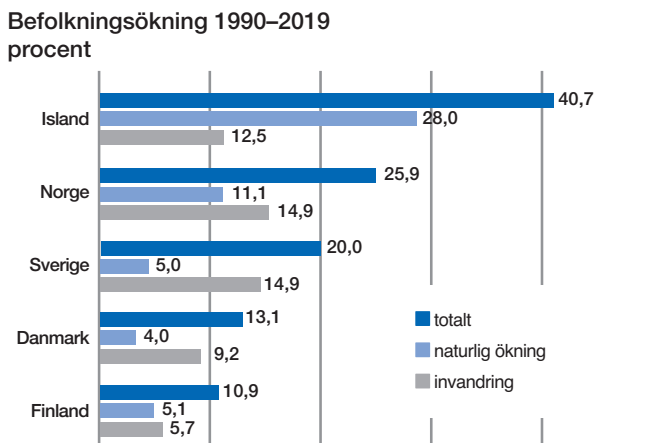


Figure 5 Population growth in the Nordic countries in percentage terms, 1990–2019  
Source: State of the Nordic Region 2020

What then about the demographic development in the largest Nordic country, Sweden? It contrasts with developments in Finland, mostly due to immigration. The population is expected to have grown to 11 million by 2028. The share of pensioners and older people is also growing quickly in Sweden, but that is compensated by immigration and by a higher birth rate than in Finland.

The following provides some perspective. In 1969, Sweden had 8 million inhabitants; by 2004, that had reached 9 million. Since then, the population has risen rapidly. In 2017, the population reached 10 million and forecasts are for 11 million by 2028. That means an average increase of 100,000 inhabitants annually. A fifth of the growth is explained by a birth surplus, that is, births exceeding deaths. However, the remaining 80% is explained by net immigration. The share of immigrants born outside Sweden in 2019 was 19 % of

the Swedish population, that is, just under 2 million. Finland was long the largest source of immigrants, but today it is Syria, followed by Finland and Iraq (OECD 2020b).

According to Statistics Sweden, the population in 62 Swedish municipalities declined in the 2010s. The primary reason was deaths exceeding births. In most of these 62 municipalities, the decrease was marginal, but in some, there was a drop of over 10%. Övertorneå in Norrbotten saw the largest decline, while Sundbyberg, north of Stockholm, grew by almost 40%. The Swedish patterns reflect trends in Finland, too. The rift between city and country is widening and the depopulated areas are growing both in number and size. This has certain future consequences for the distribution of welfare and for demographics (World Population Prospects – Population Division – United Nations 2019). The Nordic Council of Ministers noted in its State of the Nordic Region report (2020) the large differences between different regions in the Nordic countries, and, above all, within Finland. The report draws attention, among many other things, to income differences. Households' disposable income after tax in Finland between 2011 and 2017 fell more strongly than in any other Nordic country. Incomes fell in almost half of all Finnish municipalities while they rose in all municipalities in the other Nordic countries. The biggest reasons provided were structural problems in industry as well as growing unemployment and rural depopulation. When the Nordic regions are compared by population development, labour market and the economy, four Finnish regions rank last. The lowest places are held by Southern Savo, followed in turn by Kymenlaakso, Kainuu and North Karelia. Finland does best in the areas of income distribution and climate efforts. The share of municipalities with a problematic dependency ratio (i.e., the difference between the share of active employees and pensioners or older people) in Finland is many times larger than in the other Nordic countries (Finland Demographics 2020 (Population, Age, Sex, Trends) – Worldometer 2020).

## What will the future bring?

A recent study at the University of Washington School of Medicine asserts that the global population will peak at 9.7 billion by 2064 and decline to 8.8 billion by 2100 ("The Lancet: World population likely to shrink after mid-century, forecasting major shifts in global population and economic power", 2020). This is a slightly gloomier (or more optimistic, depending on perspective) prognosis than the ones put forward by the United Nations. The study from University of Washington takes as its starting point total fertility rates and replacement levels. It indicates that by 2100, 183 of 195 countries will have total fertility rates below the replacement level of 2.1 births. Countries like Spain, Italy and Thailand could shrink by more than 50 percent. The study also suggests that the elderly will make up a bigger part of the total than previously foreseen by the U.N.



The implications of this development are many. Some of them are, alas, already now to be seen in ageing countries like Finland. But governments all over the world will soon have to rethink their policies on taxation, elderly care, migration and, in general, economic development. The study from Washington suggests that parts of the decline can be offset by immigration, indicating that countries with a liberal position on immigration will fare better in the future.

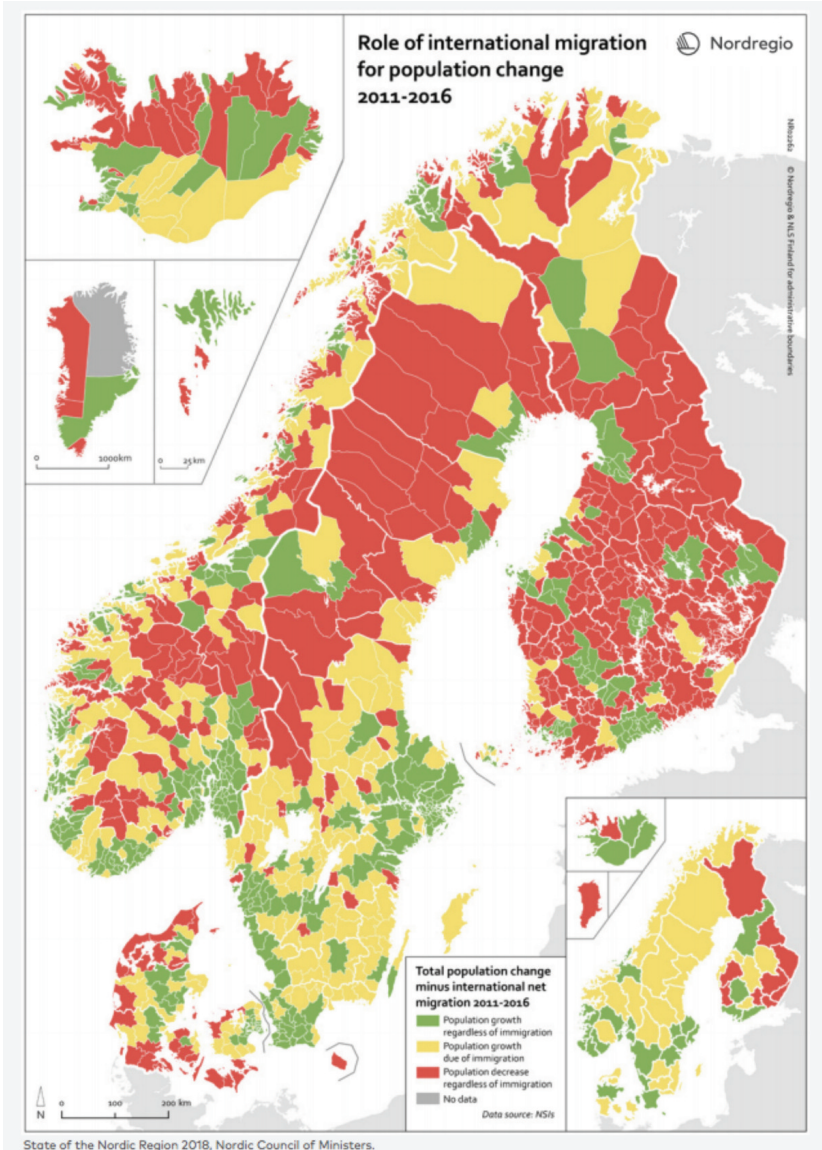
This is a message that does not fit particularly well in times of pandemics, populism and closed borders. But it seems obvious that an ageing society with fewer workers could lead Europe and the world to a situation reminiscent of the Great Plague in the 12th century. The worldwide plague brought with it not only illness and devastation and death. In its wake also followed rapidly rising salaries for the few remaining workers in Europe. With declining birth rates the value of a mobile worker will rise exponentially. Suddenly migrants and immigrants will no longer be seen as a problem or as a challenge but as a fundamental necessity for every future oriented society. Which leads us to the following question: what kind of immigration do we need in the future? Immigration leading to the newcomers settling and slowly ageing like all others? Or immigration based on Gastarbeiter-principles – with people coming for work and going when the work has been done?

No easy answers are to be given. The Nordic countries tend to top different European and global rankings regarding happiness, anti-corruption, climate and gender equality. At the same time the Nordics have, at least from a demographic point of view, been digging their own graves for a long time. With extensive support for families with children all the five countries already have a large female representation in the workforce. Contrary to the situation in the European south there are no large pools of unemployed women in the Nordics. The number of retired individuals re-entering the work force is also growing steadily, just as in EU in general. The flipside of all this is that unemployment in all the five Nordic countries is very much lower in the native population than among immigrants and other newcomers. In 2017 almost 20 per cent of the individuals aged 15-64 and born outside the EU living in Finland were registered as unemployed. The number for Denmark and Norway was 11 per cent (Finland Demographics 2020 (Population, Age, Sex, Trends) – Worldometer 2020).

On a more general level three overarching trends can be identified in the Nordic countries. The first of these is, alas, ageing populations and falling numbers of children. The fertility rate (as a total) in the Nordic countries is falling and will soon reach 1,8. The second trend is rapid urbanisation and rural depopulation. And the third trend is growing immigration from countries outside the Nordic bloc. The arrival of people from other parts of Europe and the world has increased considerably during the past two decades, and especially since 2004. Approximately 70 per cent of the population growth in the Nordics since 2006 is due to immigration. There was a peak in 2016 with almost 400 00 individuals

coming to the Nordic countries and with more than 160 000 going to Sweden. Today the total number is around 300 000 arrivals.

The following map partly illustrates the situation ("Archives: Maps | Nordregio", 2020).



The red colour indicates municipalities or regions that show a population decrease regardless of immigration. These red areas are especially visible in Finland and in Norway. Young people leaving these areas tend to accelerate the ageing of the remaining population. The yellow colour indicates areas that have population growth due to immigration. These yellow areas tend to be high up in the north or deep down in the south. They also tend to center around the capitals Oslo, Stockholm and Helsinki. Finally, the green colour indicates areas with a positive population growth regardless of immigration. These green areas are quite far in between.

The conclusion seems obvious: all the Nordic countries, with the possible exception of Sweden, are facing a geographical and demographic challenge. Internal migration obviously will not provide a lasting solution – it will only strengthen the depopulation of already sparsely populated areas. Considering the low fertility rates, it seems obvious that the only real solution to the challenges facing the Nordic welfare states lie in a general acceptance of people coming from other parts of the world. To which can be added that a general acceptance is not enough. The newcomers to the high European north also need decent and relevant work opportunities. This will be one of the really big challenges for the Nordics in a post-pandemic world.

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## Giulio Saputo: **EUROPE, MIGRATION AND THE DOWNFALL OF METHODOLOGICAL NATIONALISM**

### A world made of nations

Methodological nationalism is a child of the modern and contemporary age. This theory slipped unnoticed in our consciousness throughout the last centuries, making us believe that the entire history of the world was nothing but a tale of the Western Nation-State. This latter political organization, according to its enthusiastic supporters, was simply the most natural among those ever tempted, and therefore the most responding to the needs of the peoples. The national leviathan itself, even before Hobbes, was ruling the lives of the European citizens, in the primitive form of the power wielded by the ancient kings. In the modern age, the evolution of the European societies bounded the rulers and the lands together, thereby creating a vicious circle between the newly born central political authority, the feudal system and the dwellers living in a certain place. The Nation-State raised as the final stage of this long but steady process. At the very beginning of international relations, there were many similarities between the authority exerted by the ancient monarchy and that claimed by the infant modern Nations. Firstly, the Nation did not acknowledge any natural and thus legit authority but itself, precisely as the European kings and queens (*l'Etat c'est moi*). Secondly, the Nation did not consider any interest worthy but those pursued by its leaders, closely reminding the past aristocratic privileges (with writers like Edmund Burke embodying that feeling). The social sciences followed the middle-class justification of nationalism, not questioning its validity and in fact contributing to the legitimization of the process; sciences like economy, history and sociology moved their initial steps in this cultural environment (Woolf, 1996).

The first critic of “methodological nationalism”, though never so named, came with the early radical-liberal and Marxist philosophers, who questioned the theoretical model and its scientific conclusions. Nowadays, we are more and more aware of the problems and limits of this national-centric perspective. Still, the logic of its “naturalness” is a serious obstacle to any serious development in this field. The issue is not only academic. Indeed, the world in which we live in, notwithstanding the theories and the interpretation forced on it, is already challenging this methodological approach, forging new networks of goods and peoples and casting a new light over old transnational phenomena not clearly understood before. Globalization is a relatively new world trend, but its roots are deeper than we commonly think. On this regard, one aspect hugely underestimated in our societies, likely for widespread political convenience, is the divarication between two worlds that are marching on different paths. One of them is the product of the last two European centuries; nationally focused, upheld by traditional media, territorially based, and ruled by national politicians. The second one mirrors the emerging

dimension of globalization; made by travellers, upheld by the internet, united by ports and airports, and ruled by international yet minor authorities. Many thinkers and contemporary philosophers are wondering if and how these two worlds will be rejoined, or, alternatively, which one will prevail. As far as our continent is concerned, some contend that the European Union could be a decisive factor in smoothing this uneasy but necessary journey. In order to better understand this argumentation though, we need to take a small step back and retrace the origin of this debate, along with the main actors hitherto involved.

## Internal and external: our society and the foreigner

According to the German sociologist Max Weber, the contemporary Nation-State is one of the first political organizations to claim for itself the monopoly of force over a certain pre-emptively identified territory. This exclusive power is mastered through a complex bureaucracy and is often based on coercion. The State and the Nation coincide as they were facets of the same natural order; while the Nation is nothing but the people living in the defined land, the State is the manifestation of a mutual pact providing order to what would be otherwise a lawless community. And as the Nation is uniform for customs, traditions, and language, so the governance should be for the equality of laws. Of course, the overlapping between the two concepts was not immediate nor so “natural” in the centuries before. In the Middle Age, for instance, the Nation was indeed significant to determine the birthplace of the individuals, but it rarely mirrored the political authority wherein the same person was expected to live his/her life afterwards. On the contrary, the regional laws in that time would change so rapidly that even the religion itself was likely to shift overnight, at least until the “*cuius regio, eius religio*” principle came into force (Rokkan, 1999). Therefore, the Nation, even if located in a more or less static territory, was expected to be inevitably divided. As for the State, it was obviously a multi-national institution, tied together by a pyramid of personal loyalties.

Only the French Revolution, reverting bottom-up the legitimacy of power, firstly sought to justify the new order that was being built by empowering the idea of Nation. The founding fathers of the Weberian Nation-State are thus French philosophers like Rousseau and Herder, rather than Robespierre himself (Hobsbawn, 2004). Still, the course of history hugely influenced the realization of the idea of Nation not less than the theoretical root from which it blossomed. Events such as the Napoleonic wars and the French conquest of the continent, together with the nation-building process led by Paris, paved the way for a unification of France and then Europe under the military banners of the *levee en masse*. The wake of National consciousness that followed in the whole Ancien Règime was deemed to change forever the history of humanity (Albertini, 2017). From the first moment, this common National belonging was defined by excluding the “foreigners”; namely those expunged by the group-in-formation because not suitable to

meet certain cultural or linguistic standards (Rae, 2011). The consequence was that the former neighbours, used to be part of the same religious or territorial community earlier, quickly became strangers. Quoting the contemporary thinker Zygmunt Bauman (who interpreted the Russian masterpiece *Anna Karenina*): “All societies produce strangers, but each kind of society produces its own kind of strangers and it produces them in its own inimitable way”. This is a good description of what happened in the early XIX century (Bauman, 1995).

Almost every European Nation took its flag after the French one, mutating only the colours or the dimension/direction of the stripes (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012). The old conflicts were buried and reduced to squabbles typical of a dark age. However, along with the conflicts, even the old transnational ties between the European peoples were buried and too easily forgotten. In the words of the French scholar Ernest Renan: “The oblivion, and I'll say even the historical error, are a key factor in the creation of a nation, to the extent that the progress of historical studies is often a danger to nationality (...). Yet the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things. No French citizen knows whether he is a Burgundian, an Alan, a Taifale, or a Visigoth, yet every French citizen has to have forgotten the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, or the massacre that took place in the South in the thirteenth century” (Renan, 2018). Evidently, the French Revolution at its beginning was not a racist phenomenon, nor motivated by negative feelings. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was a concrete effort made to overcome the “natural” distinction between diverse peoples and to bridge their differences for a greater aim. The parity between individuals was an important cornerstone of the National self-awareness and that could not be forgotten (Tackett, 1997). Nonetheless, the history of the following years mostly denied the achievements in this sense that the revolution had made. Once victorious over the shambles of the old European order, the new paradigm in fact evolved into more radical and therefore more troubling formations, developing dangerous ideas of exclusion. Whereas the French revolution had recognized the cultural pillar as the foundation of the National spirit, many authors of the late XIX century began matching the cultural bond with other physical elements, such as race and blood (Meinecke, 1970). The story of the ensuing years is (or at least should be) the very foundation of our democracies. The stark attack on the idea of humanity that emerged with the world wars and the extermination camps was probably the most terrible and at the same time formative experience that our continent ever endured. From that experience, Europe emerged victorious but culturally shocked and lost in several respects.

In a deep state of self-reflection, many scholars tried to retrace the origin of that horror, coming to the conclusion that unquestioning the reasons behind the National belief had been a severe mistake. Authors like the above-mentioned late XIX century Renan were reappraised, contending that the unity of the Nation was a façade lacking any credibility. For the most radicals, the “daily referendum” through which the Nation recognizes itself



is a symbol of its flaws as a model (Levi, 2008). On the other hand, though, even the affirmation of this paradigm against its contenders needed a justification, to better understand how and why the Nation historically prevailed. The post-war literature singled out some factors created from the involuntary cooperation of three different ideologies: the idealism, which sustained the Nation as a synonym of modernity and evolution, hoping to find through this mean a tool to stabilize forever the international relations; the socialism, which underpinned this experiment to convey social justice to the commons through the organization that they felt more natural to them; the liberalism that for many reasons associated the Nation-State to the concept of economic development. As we can see nowadays, all these ideologies ultimately failed in achieving their goals. The Nation-State Europe was indeed more prosperous than the previous feudalism, but arguably more peaceful or human, as painfully reminded by the recent history. Besides, the world paid for much of this economic development under colonial rule, questioning the theories of interdependency between economic freedom and human rights.

From the present standpoint, the abortion of these high hopes is conceivable if we consider the lack of interest for the inter-national relations devoted thus far by those committed to advancing the liberal/socialist agenda. Regardless of their political faith, the National leaders worldwide spent a lot of efforts in building a stable and lawful internal organization for their Countries, at the same time allowing the establishment of a de-facto "bellum omnium contra omnes" order in the international stage. Every ideology was used to believe that a more just social order would have educated the individuals, improving the average morality, and therefore sharing the burden of democracy across the civil society. Yet education alone could not fill the institutional gaps, and in particular the original distinction made between the reference community and those believed foreigners. The borders dividing Nations thus became the thin line separating legality and chaos, human rights and the void. This double standard eroded, in the end, the same foundation of democracy. The failure of this system spurred a debate over the compatibility between the national tenet and the recognition of the universal values of the French revolution. This debate, specifically, addressed the "ways and means paradox", wondering why a political instrument for progress eventually became the end of the process itself (Anderson, 1991). Rethinking the centrality of the Nation naturally requires a conceptual struggle to change the way of thinking of the last centuries. For the social sciences, that might be similar to what the "Copernican revolution" was for astronomy. "Nothing can distort the true picture of conditions and events in this world more than to regard one's own country as the center of the universe, and to view all things solely in their relationship to this fixed point. (...). Our political and social conceptions are Ptolemaic. The world in which we live is Copernican" (Reves, 1945).

One of the most prominent scholars that gave the fillip for this revolution was the sociologist Ulrich Beck. Among his many merits, this sociologist is rather known for his definition of "methodological nationalism"; a term that he invented to unify the several

critics already advanced to the national-centric ideology and also comprehend a new interpretation of the Gramscian hegemony (Robinson, 2005). In contrast to the classic paradigm of the social sciences, Beck proposed a new “Methodological cosmopolitanism”, that is to say an interpretation of the social events that may pass through a transnational lens. Quoting his own words, the Copernican cosmopolitanism would help the shift: “...from a national outlook in which the nation is the axis, the fixed star, around which the world turns to a cosmopolitan outlook where this nation-centric world picture appears historically false” (Beck, 2016). The first aim of the new model is, of course, reading the present *Zeitgeist* in a truthful manner. In this sense, the contribution of Beck in giving an authentic interpretation of the “risk society” cannot be underrated. Even more practically, phenomena like the technological substitution of human labour, the emergence of the IT society and the digital breakthrough will one day require a completely different interpretation of the causes that drove humanity to the present point. The “cosmopolitan” methodology will be likely the best reading tool (Beck, 2007).

Indeed, even today finding the old “us” and “them” is hard when it comes to analyse the development of global circumstances as those aforementioned. The “butterfly effect” has always made the world interdependent, but now the transnational challenges that the peoples on earth must face together are so naturally interlaced that believing in national solutions can only lead to a logical downfall. On the one hand, the economy, following a trend initiated with the industrial revolution, is slipping through any form of political control; sometimes involuntary because of the same structure of the modern business, sometimes on purpose to evade taxation. On the other hand, the individuals, not feeling anymore the past allegiances, act like atoms in an open circuit, finding the journey of life more thrilling than the birthplace community. The two things combined are prompting a revolution in customs, arts, lifestyle, and politics. The former certainties, based on positivist postulations, have been changed with existential dilemma, while the technological world of the “hard sciences” is on the opposite running at a fast pace. Against the odds, the result apparently is not a new enlightenment but, as we are getting to know, a widespread rejection of science and the prevalence of relativism. The triumph of a “likewise truth” over reality is another stage of this rejection that we see in many forms, often mingled with positive messages like social engagement and a critical approach to the official media. In other words, the global society compared to the past is indeed better educated and more aware of the individual interest, but at the expenses of the historical memory, which is traditionally a pillar of any collective entity. This is a reason why from this mostly immaterial society must still emerge a political institution.

## Understanding the mistrust

The global society is bound together by shared interests, informal links, and multinational organizations whose importance is increasing. In this environment, profit is only one of the motivations behind interconnection, and not always the principal. The global society is not engaged in the stock market, but frequently the stock market takes advantage of the existing relationships among several actors; churches, non-profit organizations, youth movements and so on. Business is an important part of the overall picture, but as the years pass even the top corporations are in need to stick to the ethical agenda dictated by the global society (i.e. antidiscrimination issues). The residual sovereignty of the Nation-State finds application in its traditional fields of competences, namely the sword (coercive power) and the gold (monetary policy). However, things are rapidly changing. On the monetary issues, the growing projects of common currencies are shaking the exclusive competences of the Central Banks, favouring new aggregations, and opening new markets. The Euro in Europe is a reality, the Asian Monetary Unit is an experiment going in that direction, and probably Africa (totally or regionally) will be the next in line to consider such a revolutionary project (Montani, 2020). Should all these tests fail, there are alternative forms of money like the cryptocurrencies ready to work for the global societies, taking the momentum offered by the modern technologies. For what concerns coercive power instead, this privilege remains in the hands of the National governments only so long as new actors do not rise. The Islamic State, for instance, challenged the world order of Westphalia precisely because this monstrous organization called to arms people for their faith, and not following National cleavages. Somehow, it was an ancient echo of the past deeply rooted in the global society. On a smaller scale, even the private military company reminds us of old habits presented in a new guise (Bauman, 2014).

Against this background, the only democratic institutions legally recognized are the National parliaments, which are constantly grappling with their impotence in governing a reality far too complex both for them and the governments that they should keep in check. Finding a balance between individual rights, social protection, and National competitiveness is a conundrum that only rarely the legislative branch can solve. In the early 2000 for instance the Western politicians seemingly believed that fostering a healthy business competition at the international level was a good thing, notwithstanding the potential adverse effects on society. After the economic crisis of 2008, when the unfair competition of some Countries was publicly voiced, the misconduct of many companies exposed and the demand for exceptional measures peaked, the National authorities struggled to take back the control that they had granted. After more than a decade, there are a few timid steps in that direction, so insignificant that there is a widespread concern for a second wave of disruption caused by the same holes (Bauman, 2017). This is hardly surprising after all, given that the social concertation relies on outdated National organizations, such as the

Unions, engaged in talks with transnational and often elusive interlocutors that they can't keep up with. Apparently, the National actors are in a strong position against a single company, as big as it might be; the Unions are sponsored by their same Parliament/government, while the global chains do not enjoy any kind of protection, but the legal one recognized by the host State itself. Obviously, in a globalized world, the opposite is real, because the multinational company can leave any Country without negative fallouts, while the Nation-State has no legal leverage to prevent the departure (and thus the job loss) except fiscal concessions (Castel, 2003).

The debacle of the Nation-State even in the job market is important for its consequences over the peoples' psychology. The old National associations are quite ineffective, but the recognition of new transnational realities is yet to come. Visibly, the same happens in many fields, from data protection to the consumer's rights, every day. Unsurprisingly, the outcome is a loss of confidence that the people have in their own institutions, the scepticism for every traditional organization and disappearance of a spirit of solidarity that they don't feel to receive in the first place. The demand for social protection is thus frustrated, weakening the trust for any kind of authority (including science, as already mentioned). The fragile individuals are those that refuse tout-court the modern world and any hypothesis of different governance because, paradoxically, they precisely blame this non-existent governance for their condition. Chiefly moved by fear, this category of people switch causes and effects, targeting their hate at the super-national institutions established for governing the globalization instead of the globalization itself (a process that actually with the social media helps them to thrive). The demand for law and order, and the request for a greater intervention of the Nation-State in world affairs are other symptoms of this same paradoxical effect of insecurity and despair (Bauman, 2006).

The post-modern society is thus featured with a democratic connotation but expressed in an illiberal system. Social protection is an objective out of reach, and therefore what is left is a request, many times irrational, for a greater control over the public life. Anything may contribute to idealize the glorious past of the Nation is exalted, while all the recrimination for the current problems is pinned on the foreigners, whose fault is living on the wrong soil (Brexit). In this regard, the true obsession for physical security in Countries never been so secure is impossible to explain rationally, if not recurring to the cosmopolitan interpretation of history. Under this different light, we see the real question that the political quest refers to, which is the selective interconnection between peoples as against the lack of a cultural exchange between cultures and Nations (Giddens, 1991). This anomaly is brilliantly expressed by the screenwriter John Guare, when he voices this concern through one of his characters: "I read somewhere that everybody on this planet is separated by only six other people. Six degrees of separation. Between us and everybody else on the planet. The President of the United States. A gondolier in Venice. Fill in the names. I find that

A) tremendously comforting that we're so close and B) like Chinese water torture that we're so close. Because you have to find the right six people to make the connection. It's not just big names. It's anyone...six degrees of separation between me and everyone else on this planet. But to find the right six people!" (Guare, 1990).

The separation of the six people that the comedy mentions is not only between individuals, but also among different cultures, mentalities, and jurisdictions that may enlarge or narrow the communication exchange. And here comes the Web. Certainly, the Internet is one of the pillars of the globalized world, and the essential element to approach reality, following Beck. Through this tool, we can jump the gaps separating us from people and ideas, reaching all those who chose to share the same place. As maintained by many, the Web is like a virtual big square, the ancient agorà of our times where anyone can voice his/her opinion and be heard. Akin thousands of years ago, the square is for us a symbol of freedom and democracy. In that place the political parties were used to organize their meetings, the fine arts developed for the collective enjoyment, and the religion/s was worshipped. Indeed, the central square of the Greek cities was the symbol of the polis, and as such was close to all the symbols representing that union: the sacred places; the library; the theatre; the palaces of power. Yet the Internet and social media are barren of any symbol of unification. Wikipedia, unlike the great libraries, is punctual and helpful to find information, but not always good in providing reliability for the thereof. Where there should be the academic authority, there is the good will of a private organization. The social media are empty of reference to values or principles, and in the hands of a few billionaires that from one American State set the strategies shaping our own personal outward; the words that we use, the content that we can post, the reactions that we can have. As far as the power is concerned, it is relegated to a handful of institutional websites in shortage of appeal. Considering that for millions of people what happens on the Internet is equally or more important than the reality itself, it is clear that the virtual square offered by the web is not like the centre of a Greek city, but rather like an American town in the old "wild" west.

The scarce presence of the official institutions on the Internet is however balanced by a pervasive political debate that mobilizes new actors, such as influencers, youtubers, fashion experts and many common people, whose ideas, if well conveyed, can become viral. The official politics could not lead the process and so it followed; the national politicians opened their Instagram accounts and Facebook pages, imitating the style of the popular stars of the web at the expense of real contents (Castells, 2009). The Social media were at the same time vehicles and ends of this communication strategy. As a result, the National confrontation slowly changed, starting to react to a number of garbled inputs coming from abroad. After the confused and disoriented National reaction to this new stage of globalization, what was used to be a "common space" was transformed into a showcase of different boxes. In these boxes, the political divide is so polarized that anyone is induced to exclude (virtually) the rival supporters. This is the recreation of a primordial form of group: the "small imaginary community", a human gathering that has

its own symbols and leaders, but feels poor responsibility for its actions (Bauman, 2017). The “web leaders” are often unable or unwilling either to put a real attention to the single territories of their constituency or to go beyond their National mindset. At bottom, that is not even necessary for them, as the community that they speak to is self-referential, detached from reality (real statistics and/or practical local problems) and with a volatile opinion (Crouch, 2004).

Much has been written on the epilogue of the last century ideology. Yet the most worrying fact about the disappearance of the Catholic, liberal, and socialist identities is that all of them shared some fundamental points in common which characterise our culture: the trust in man and universality. Decaying the old political schools that were setting the boundaries of the public debate, the odds are that the casualty may be the values that they represented. This outcome is likely in Europe, a continent where the increasing globalization met a wave cynicism rising among the population. Except for some Countries, the old continent suffered from the economic crisis more than anyone else, with tragic consequences over the job market, the youth, and culture. On the verge of an existential crisis, Europe has to face many challenges, internal and external, that will be testing the resilience of the European Union and the democracy of its member States.

## European civilization?

The political impact of the post-modern society is outstanding for Europe. For decades, our continent has been embroiled in a cultural civil war against itself potentially leading to a destruction with no clear winner. Amidst the numerous challenges, those regarding the protection of democracy and the preservation of human rights are doubtless the most worrying and concrete (Beck, 2018). The European culture is on the brink of embracing complete nihilism. If Nietzsche murdered God and religion, Heidegger the resemblance of Truth and Adorno what was left behind ideologies, nothing universally trusted is to be left. The dissolution of freedom, democracy and the same concept of civilization could not help but follow, despite the material well-being of the continent, never so rich nor so peaceful (Vattimo, 2011).

In this sense, the topic of migration is just a signal, the most distressing, of this moral dissolution. Here in Europe, we see the same contraposition between the “national” and the “foreigner” that shaped the meaning of Nation at its early stage, but not more tempered by the human values conveyed by enlightenment. On the contrary, the fraternity between human beings seems to be a relic of the past sinking in the Mediterranean Sea precisely as the boats are full of people that struggle to reach our shores. Only incidentally these strangers, that are non-person because not part of the National community, come from Africa; racism has always been a vicious enemy

and its target historically changed. Different forms, same manners (Dal Lago, 2009). The contemporary leaders, unfortunately with little distinction, offer simple (National) solutions for complex (international) problems, so pandering to people's baser instincts.

At the same time, the European borders are the real barriers separating civilization and chaos, the rule of law and the hope for survival. As the news every day testify, the thin and (of course) imaginary lines delimiting the National seas or territory are bargaining spots where peoples and principles are weighted and exchanged (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). The chronicles of this times remind us past memories and deep reflections that were almost forgotten. Among them, there was the pain of entire peoples oppressed that were escaping from the harshness of their original place; a condition so precarious that cannot be confronted by individuals but only by strong and determined communities. The blame for the community therefore should not traduced in a shame for the individuals, especially when the community itself grapples with inequalities imported from abroad and political interference. Against this background, the best far-sighted attitude should be compassion and activism, and not repulsion and indifference (Sayad, 1999).

Hannah Arendt, one of the most known intellectuals of our times, warned us about the "de-humanization" of the foreigner in her masterpiece on the origin of Totalitarianism. According to the philosopher, one of the basic entitlements that any democratic society should grant to everyone is: "the right of asylum, the only right that had ever figured as a symbol of the Rights of Man in the sphere of international relationships" (Arendt, 1958).

Shattering the human rights to favour a national law that is for its own nature relative and not universal would mean undermining the very assumptions upon which our societies have been built. Naturally, the risk is to find in our path the same discrimination that we experienced a century ago, hidden behind superficial distinctions like the one between economic and political migrant. If the human rights are valid because holistically intended, then we cannot cherry pick on them (Zanfrini, 2019). Twenty years ago, Abdelmalek Sayad recounted the paradoxical life of a migrant in its book "The double absence"(Sayad, 1999). The author thereby described the inner drama of a person split in half, never fully integrated in the community of arrival and yet too distant from that of departure. On this edge, Europe should find a balance, looking beyond the dichotomy hospitality/rejection and thinking of new ways of integration. The post-Marxist thought of Arnold Toynbee helps us in identifying the working class as leading actors of this process; even though on two different fringes, the peoples involved on the two sides of the European border share more than they feel. On one side, we have desperate individuals that are looking for a better life, deprived of hopes and in need. On the other, we have similar individuals speaking a different language, who are losing their

purposes and bearings. Both sides are somehow victims of globalization, and both suffer the failure of their political class in governing the circumstances. As Toynbee himself wrote once: "The true hall-marks of the proletariat is neither poverty nor humble birth but a consciousness- and the resentment that this consciousness inspires of being disinherited from his ancestral place in society." In this world, that is a common place for many (Toynbee, 1987).

The actual enemy is thus unsurprising social inequality, one of the typical consequences of a capitalist-based society. Today, as much as 1/4 of the European population live either in poverty or in social exclusion (120 millions for Eurostat). After 15 years of crisis, the social injustice is rising vertically and horizontally, digging into a hole that was already deep enough. The middle class in an existential struggle for survival, while the richest are doubling their fortunes. Once again, the rentiers that can dispose of a significant capital enjoy unjust returns, whereas the workers' savings are depleting. Furthermore, in Europe, the Member States are alienated one from another, because the same inequality that we see among individuals is mirrored internationally by the lack of interest for deploying common policies. The outcome is an extension of the contrast centre-periphery in international relations. Evidently, a constant state of emergency is not the best way to address composite problems like these, which are rather structural than temporary. For the same reason, investing time and resources in the consumption market to restore the economy is not the wisest possible approach, giving that the profits eventually made are not distributed fairly. What we may need instead is a new process of civilization to re-recreate common values and re-think our convictions about development (Elias, 2000). Internally, this revolution passes through a renewed democracy that may be more inclusive and responsible, and externally through a remodulation of the National paradigm underpinning the current system. The two institutional leaps forward should be accompanied by an interiorization of cosmopolitanism and a replacement of the old methodology (Castaldi, 2006-2007). In some respects, the European Union is channelling this change, giving a hard time to the resurgence of nationalism in the old continent. Nevertheless, the EU to be a revolutionary force needs to clarify beforehand the ends of its own institutional experiment, undertaking a profound reform to finally give more power to the supranational institutions advancing human rights and less to the narrow-minded Nation States. The time is not on its side though, and the departure of the United Kingdom is likely just the first signal of a negative bias that we will see toward this institution. Should the reactionary forces prevail, the risk is a "de-civilization" of Europe, and the advent of a behaviour that Eric Hobsbawm calls "new barbarism" (Hobsbawm, 1998).



## Conclusions

The effort required to build a cosmopolitan consciousness is ongoing but, against the serious challenges that Europe has to face, the time is poor (Beck, 2016). Today, the liberal world is sinking under the famous Trilemma of Dani Rodrik, which contends that: “we cannot simultaneously pursue democracy, national determination, and economic globalization. If we want to push globalization further, we have to give up either the nation state or democratic politics. If we want to maintain and deepen democracy, we have to choose between the nation state and international economic integration. And if we want to keep the nation state and self-determination, we have to choose between deepening democracy and deepening globalization” (Rodrik, 2011). Unfortunately, there is not much to do to oppose the new wave of extremism that is spreading across the Western hemisphere but reinforcing the multinational institutions that will represent just laws and universal values. The European Union obviously is not the only solution to the current problems. Still, the idea (or utopia) of a supranational order is undoubtedly a way out from the worst alternative, which is the termination of democracy. The European Union with its bearing enshrines an “old” moral balance. Simple political choices, such as the peaceful resolution of conflicts, the quest for a more ethical economy, and the hope for a better and sustainable future, are extraordinary in times of crisis. A good political institution nowadays would give direction, sense, and leadership to its people, stopping this vicious circle. This ideal political entity would put into reality the cosmopolitan thought, by so doing rendering the world itself closer to its natural and historical form. As all the social constructs, the National identity is an artifice. For a long time, it gave meaning to the lives of millions of peoples, closing their self-awareness in a rigid and pre-set boundary. The reality of the open identity, or multiple identity, is though more correspondent to reality and closer to the nature of the human being. Any civilization is crafted by the endless energy made up by the reunion of several human differences in the name of a common goal whereas barbarism is the dispersion of the same energy for fear of contact. Tzvetan Todorov once wrote that the beginning of barbarism is “not recognizing the humanity of others, whereas its contrary, civilization, is precisely the ability to see others as others and yet to accept at the same time that they were as human as ourselves.” (Todorov, 2010).

Rather than a specific issue, civilization is a necessary framework for every single political decision. If the framework is consistent with high moral principles, the same principles that Europe was used to have, then the single political decisions will be smoothly put in the right direction. This is not, as Voltaire would say, the best possible world, but simply a one coherent with our past and the ethos that the Europeans already forged (Mikkeli, 1998 & A.V, 2019). By contrast, building a European fortress behind high walls or deadly seas wouldn't solve any of the current problems. This seclusive alternative is illusory and deemed to fail practically and ethically. The

“nationalization” of the European integration process, an evolution in line with the latter political choice, would on the other hand just repeat the past mistakes, simply expanding the margins of error. The only viable substitute against the “Europe-Nation” and the “Europe of Nations” is the “Project-Europe”. If Europe is democracy and the origins of democracy are in Athens, we should thus remind the teachings of those people. Quoting Jean Cuisenier: “...les Grecs donnent à entendre que l'ethnicité d'un peuple, ce par quoi un peuple a une identité de peuple, ne réside ni dans la langue, ni dans le territoire, ni dans la religion, ni dans telle ou telle propriété particulière, mais dans le projet et les activités qui donnent sens à l'usage de la langue, à la possession d'un territoire, à la pratique de coutumes et de rites religieux” (Cuisenier, 1993).<sup>3</sup> The project could be, even today, the pillar of our society, if we made a bold ethical choice. Therefore, the battle for civilization is not just a mundane conflict to change laws or regulations, but a meaningful activity of political activism, because thinking how Europe could be is already an accomplishment (De Rougemont, 1996). The self-righteousness of those “born in the right side of the world” needs to be replaced with a new sense of responsibility, self-criticism and burden sharing. In this way, our Europe would find its way and position in an international environment dominated by National leaders like D. Trump, V. Putin e Xi Jinping. In an age of confusion and National/individual egoism, the political institution leading Europe will be in any case on the right side of history (Roger, 2008). On this course, a new and at the same time old “European adventure” will be finally able to start its journey. “What would a ‘typical European’ be like?”, “‘Delicate, sensitive, educated, one who won’t break his word, won’t steal the last piece of bread from the hungry and won’t report on his inmates to the prison guard...”, “I met one such man. He was an Armenian [...]” (Bauman, 2004).

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<sup>3</sup> “... the Greeks give to understand that the ethnicity of a people, by which a people has an identity of people, does not reside neither in the language, nor in the territory, nor in the religion, nor in such or such property particular, but in the project and the activities that give meaning to the use of the language, to the possession of a territory, to the practice of religious customs and rites”

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Andrea Virág, Bianka Demeter,  
Dora Pakai, Kamilla Kiraly, and Marton Gera:  
**WORKER AND STUDENT MOBILITY, AND  
LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY IN HUNGARY  
IN LIGHT OF COVID-19 CRISIS**

### An increasing number: Hungarian students at universities abroad

In the spring of 2020, the most recent statistics about the Hungarian higher education applications were published. While the earlier years already made apparent a decrease in the number of applications, the new data was more surprising: in 2020, with 20.000 fewer students submitted an application than in the last year. The last time when there were such a few students was 2001 (Népszava, 2020). As the numbers came out, education experts – but also the Hungarian public – had started to wonder about the reasons, and tried to explain the trend. Among these explanations there was the international student mobility, meaning Hungarian students have started to apply to universities abroad in large numbers, which eventually affects the applications and admissions in Hungary („mfor.hu”, 2020). As Péter Radó, an education expert and research fellow at the Central European University (CEU) put it in 2018, “the number of the Hungarian students studying abroad will certainly not decrease” in the coming years (Vasárnapi Hírek, 2018).

Although the topic has become part of the public as well as political discourse in Hungary, a detailed and research-driven statistic about the real number of Hungarian students studying at universities abroad is missing (Szabó, 2009). Scholars and people who are interested need to rely on estimations and statistics from foreign universities, thus the numbers will always be controversial and questionable. Nevertheless, based on such statistics and estimations, it is clear that more and more students turn away from the Hungarian higher education system year by year, and therefore apply to abroad. As we will see, that does not necessarily mean that all of them will start their education abroad as some students only consider this option, but ultimately do not apply. In the following section, using the limited yet existing data, we examine what can be known about international student mobility among Hungarian students.

#### Numbers, destinations and motivations

One of the broadest studies about Hungarian youth found in 2019 that one-fifth (20 percent) of university students want to apply to universities abroad. This number is higher by two percent compared to 2018 (18 percent), however, the study only focused on higher education students, and thus it does not tell whether or not a similar trend can be found among secondary education students. Another study, published in 2017, however,

revealed that from the highest ranked, Budapest-based high schools almost every tenth student (9,9 percent) applied to universities abroad, although it is not clear if they also got admitted and ultimately enrolled (Nyirô, 2017). A survey from 2018 showed a more significant trend: among people aged 14 to 25 years, almost every other (43 percent) student wants to study abroad (Vasármapi Hírek, 2018). Once again, while these numbers show that studying abroad is a real and widespread option among Hungarian youth, most of the findings only tell something about the planning phase, meaning we cannot be sure if such findings correlate with the real number of university students abroad.

It is clear that higher education and international student mobility play a crucial role in social mobility, but when it comes to our topic the case is different. As studies suggest, Hungarian students from the upper middle or the upper class are more likely to apply to universities abroad as they already have a financial background which implicitly helps to start their higher education career in a different country (Szabó, 2009). Apart from economic capital, the cultural capital – such as the ability to speak a foreign language, for example – also needs to be taken into account: while among students in the capital city 28 percent said that they were planning to study abroad, this number was only 16 percent among students in villages. Furthermore, whereas the father of the family had an academic degree, 28 percent of the students were considering universities abroad, conversely to families where the father was a skilled worker (12 percent).

An estimation from 2018 by Engame Akadémia, a Budapest-based education center, shows the most popular destination among Hungarian students is Austria (2.600 students), Germany (2.500 students) and the United Kingdom (2.050 students), followed by Denmark (1.400 students), the Netherlands (760 students) and the United States (730 students). (Index.hu, 2018) The vast majority of students stated that their decision was based on the perception that pursuing a degree abroad gives better opportunities on the job market, followed by the current political climate in Hungary and the quality of the Hungarian higher education system and its programs. While these reasons on their own can explain the increasing international student mobility among Hungarian youth, in the followings, we explore three different, more detailed reasons that might facilitate such a trend.

### **Joining the European Union: an open door towards the most prestigious universities**

By joining the European Union (EU), Hungarian students got several opportunities at the same time: not just the free movement within the block but also that they do not have to pay higher tuition fees at universities than the residents of such country – since one of the EU's requirements is that member states should charge exactly the same tuition fee for every EU students which cannot be higher than the tuition fee of their residents (Your Europe, 2020). In effect, for example, non-EU/EEA in the Netherlands usually pay 9.000 euros on average for an academic year, while students from the EU only charge 2.000 euros. Before Hungary joined the block, students had

to face – apart from scholarships and bilateral agreements between universities –, higher tuition fees and other bureaucratic procedures, including applying for a student visa. That is not the case anymore, and by analysing the most popular destinations among Hungarian students, we can conclude that those are predominantly EU member states.

In Austria and Germany, higher education in German is free for EU students, except for semester and registration fees, covering administrative costs („European Youth Portal Website”, 2020). Denmark has been attracting EU students with its free programs and community colleges, while the Netherlands only charges 2.000 euros, though in the first-year students only have to pay 1.000 euros. Among these countries, the United Kingdom is the exemption since the country’s higher education institutions were able to charge tuition fees of up to 9,250 pounds for an academic year. However, British and therefore EU students were able to access public student loans, which meant that the British government had paid their tuition fees, and they were only supposed to pay back once their future salary would reach a certain amount. Although students who started their program before 2020 in the UK would be able to use the loan system until they receive their degrees, others will lose the so-called home fee status, which will supposedly affect Hungarian students as well („UK Parliament Official Webpage”, 2020).

Finally, even though there has been an ongoing debate over the university rankings in general, namely that whether they can show accurately the quality of the higher education institutions, we also need to take into account the fact that in the above-mentioned countries students can find several leading universities. According to the Times Higher Education’s most recent world university ranking, among the top 100 institutions there are eleven British, eight German and seven Dutch, which attract many international, including Hungarian students (Times Higher Education World University Rankings, 2020).

### **The education policy of the Hungarian government**

Since coming to power in 2010, Viktor Orbán’s government has started a so-called reform in higher education. On the one hand, it meant budget cuts for certain institutions and an education philosophy – accompanied by a policy – that prioritize hard and applied sciences over social sciences and humanities (G7, 2020). On the other (and this is more important from the students’ perspective), students who get admitted to state-funded programs are expected to sign a contract with the government in where they accept that in the following 20 years after their graduation, they will work in Hungary for certain years – otherwise, they should pay back an amount equivalent to a tuition fee (Bozóki, 2011). For the government, it is an assurance against brain drain that overwhelmingly affects young and newly graduated professionals (Hoffmann, 2013). For students, however, it is a restriction

against their free movement and career opportunities. Hungarian students can still choose to enrol in a non-state-funded program and not sign such a contract, meaning that they are paying for the degree, but they can think differently and turn away from the Hungarian education system towards abroad.

### Supporting institutions and consultancy in relation to studying abroad

Over the last decade, different institutions have opened and started to help Hungarian students in relation to studying abroad. Milestone Institutie and Engame Akadémia, to name two of them, have been operating for 10 years, and offer small-scale education, including seminars on academic writing, tutoring and help in application packages for secondary education students who want to study abroad („Index.hu”, 2013). Besides some smaller, less visible institutions and consultancy firms, Milestone and Engame are dominating the Hungarian market. Although they offer scholarships for talented but disadvantaged students, generally, these are tuition fee-based institutions, highlighting again that students from the upper middle or the upper class are more likely to join one of these institutions, and ultimately apply to a foreign university (Nyírő, 2017).

In the age of the internet and online applications, one might question the role and importance of these institutions. But if we suppose that a decision about the potential destinations, universities and programs is complicated and may require external help and support, we cannot underestimate these institutions' roles that also contributed to the increasing number of applications to universities abroad.

### Language education policy: a hallway for multilingualism and European mobility

In 2016, 57.6 % Hungarians, between the age of 25 and 64, reported that they did not know any foreign language according to a research conducted by the adult education survey (AES), presented by Eurostat. (Foreign language skills statistics, 2020) This percentage was only higher in Romania (64,2%) and in the United Kingdom (65,4%) and was far from the average 35.4% of the EU-28. So, the fact that nearly two third of working-age adults in Hungary only speak their mother tongue enquires analysis of the country's foreign language education policy.

In our globalised world language became a commodity (Heller, 2010) a resource of international exchange, of cross-border communication and interactions. Knowing different languages not only gives a competitive advantage of the labour market, but also increases geographical mobility and opens up cultural barriers. Therefore, it is not surprising that the European Union is indeed a promoter of multilingualism outlooking its effects on social cohesion and reinforced intercultural dialogues among the member states.



Certainly, there are many factors behind the multilingual landscape of Europe, like geographical and linguistic proximity of languages or the existence of more than one official language in a state. Therefore, the uniqueness of Hungarian language and the nearly homogenous population of Hungary should be taken into account when it comes to intra-European mobility of Hungarians. However, the country has been a member of the EU since 2004 and a part of the Schengen zone since 2007, so it is about time to take its foreign language education policy under scrutiny.

### **Propositions from the European Union for more ambitious language education policies**

The facilitation of foreign language learning in Europe has been a well-known objective of the European Union for a long time. In addition, as the number of member states, cultures and languages seemed to increase, the question of multilingualism moved forward on the agenda of EU institutions. By decision of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union 2001 was established as The European Year of Languages to promote language learning and linguistic diversity, as key elements of Europe's cultural heritage (Decision No, 2000). Then, in March 2002 the European Council met in Barcelona where the heads of the state or government agreed on the need for action to improve language learning. So, they called for further actions, like teaching at least two foreign languages to every child from a very early age, facilitating bilateral partnerships between schools or harmonising the credit system of all European universities (Presidency Conclusions, 2002). The European Commission even proposed an Action Plan for 2004-2006 (Communication from the Commission to the Council, 2004-2006).

### **Hungary's first steps in the path designated by the EU**

Furthermore, in 2002 the Language Policy Department of the European Council set up an Expert Group to assess a Language Education Policy Profile of the member states, with their help, in order to be able to propose concrete measures for development. Hungary, who was at the doorstep of the EU, was also the first country who willingly prepared a Country Report (Country Report Hungary, 2002-2003) on language education policy and liaised with the European Council. Then, in March 2003, a roundtable discussion was organised on the Experts Report with the participation of civil society representatives, the Ministry of Education and the Council of Europe Expert Group. Based on the accepted final Profile (Language Education Policy Profile Hungary, 2002-2003), in June the Parliament amended the Public Education Act and on the European Day of Languages on 26 September 2003, the government declared the 2003/2004 school year the Year of Language Learning.

### **The introduction of an intensive language learning year in secondary school**

The Hungarian Ministry of Education launched its unprecedented language education strategy under the so-called World Language program, based on two principal goals:

firstly those foreign languages should be learnt during primary and secondary education since they include the most formative years of human development; secondly, that equal opportunities should be created in foreign language education.

The biggest achievement of the program was the launch of an extra year of intensive language learning for 9th graders (first year in secondary grammar and vocational school) with a minimum of 40% of the total curriculum time allocated for foreign language study. The aim was to ensure more effective secondary language learning without paying for private classes, thus remedying the disadvantages of institutional language teaching (Medgyes&Öveges, 2004). In addition, it prepared students to leave with an advanced-level school-leaving exam corresponding to B2 for advanced level as specified in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR-2001). The introduction of this preparatory year was optional for schools, but met with a success at first: more than 400 schools introduced the program with the participation of 12 000 students in the 2004/2005 academic year and this number increased by 3000 in the next year.

However, the trend turned around from the school year of 2009/2010 and in 2016 less than 6500 students started the program in about 152 institutions. Moreover, the majority of the schools keeping the first intensive language learning year were secondary grammar schools or even prestigious schools (Fehérvári, 2009). So, despite the intentions, inequality in language learning seems to persist (Öveges, 2018). The newly elected government in 2010 was even thinking about shutting down the program. At the end it continued with stricter requirements: 80% of the students have to achieve B2 level by the end of the 12th grade. If this condition is not fulfilled in three consecutive years, the program ends in the given institution.

## Language classes determined by the National Core Curriculum

According to the National Core Curriculum in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade language classes are optional, and they only become compulsory from 4th grade (age 11-12) which is below what the EU encourages. Also, this optionality can be a source of inequality since usually it corresponds to a lack of teachers in certain regions. In the first four years the number of classes per week is min. 2, and from 5th grade until the 12th it is minimised at 3 per week in the National Core Curriculum. With these numbers, students are expected to leave secondary education with B1 level in their first foreign language.

Surprisingly, the number of hours spent with language learning in school in Hungary is very high compared to other European countries, to achieve the same level. However, in the majority of EU countries the teaching of two foreign languages is mandatory for all for at least one year. In Hungary it is only obligatory for secondary grammar school

(Gimnázium) students (Eurydice, 2017). According to the Central Statistics Office, in 2008, 590 000 primary school students – 75% of all students – studied a foreign language. 96% of them studied one language and only 4% studied two (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 2010). In 2003 Hungarian decision-makers thought that despite the Union's wish to teach at least two foreign languages from early childhood, pupils should learn one foreign language correctly at first, then concentrate on another. This way of thinking has not changed since then.

### The decreasing number of language exams

Despite the fact that more children learn foreign languages in public schooling than 20 years ago, since 2010 the number of language exams taken is decreasing. In 2013, 27% less people tried to pass a language exam than in 2010 according to the statistics of the Education Office which is an alarming number even if we take into account the 6% decrease in the younger population. The lack of language exams really shows in tertiary education, where students are usually required to have at least one language exam in order to obtain their diploma. In 2009, a quarter of graduates did not receive their diploma due to the lack of the required exam.

The government introduced a Diploma Saving Program exactly for this reason in 2014 which consisted in free language classes. However, out of the 8300 participants only 400 people passed their exam. („Eduline”, 2015) Then those who did not take or did not pass their exam had to repay the classes. So, the government took another step and made the first language exam under 35 years of age free of charge from 2018 (Rényi, 2017). Consequently the number of exams increased slightly, by 6,2% between 2017 and 2019, and yet in 2019 there were only 124 468 people who successfully passed their language exams compared to the 173 340 in 2010 („Oktatási Hivatal”, 2019). More recently, in 2020, because of the Covid-19 pandemic the government introduced a Language Exam Exemption as a part of the Economic Protection Action Plan so all the 75 000 graduates who did not have their diploma because of the missing language exams can apply for exemption („Eduline”, 2020). The considerable number of undistributed diplomas is showing how big the problem is still regarding foreign language education.

### The source of the problem and possible solutions

Despite the high number of language classes in primary and secondary public education, accompanied with a quite unique practice of teaching in groups, it seems that the problem is lying in the methods and sources of education. According to a research („Szülői Hang”, 2019) made by the association called Parental Voice (Szülői Hang) in 2019 by asking 6 000 parents about their child's language education, 7 major problem could be highlighted: the wrong teaching methods with little focus on communication skills, the lack of teachers, their frequent change plus their contraselection, the teaching in big groups what still concerns certain classes, the non-correspondence between the level of the classes and the level of knowledge of the students, and the overload of the

kids. In the same year, before the government introduced a program proposed to 9th and 11th grade students to participate in language classes abroad for two weeks in Summer. However, only 30% of responding parents were confident in the success of this program, and only 6% believe that it would have been most important to spend money for this purpose. In 2017 the government ordered an Examination of the frameworks and efficacy of foreign language teaching in public education (Öveges & Csizér, 2018).

## Westward migration from illiberal states of the EU and influence on workforce

„Polak, Węgier, dwa bratanki...”<sup>4</sup> – This is a well-known saying in both Hungarian and Polish culture. The two Eastern European countries share not only a common history but political views by now. This is valid for both the governments and the opposite. Furthermore, there is one more common thing: EU sanctions. Both Poland and Hungary have been facing proceedings of constitutional problems: in Poland the judiciary independence is the main topic questioned by the Council of the European Union (the Council), meanwhile in Hungary, the basic European union values are violated (European Parliament, 2020).

In 2015 the presidential election in Poland brought a change and set off the country to the illiberal way, while in Hungary, PM Orbán has already told his infamous speech about the illiberal Hungarian democracy and its role model countries. These two countries are not confronting only criticism by the EU but also growing emigration, especially by younger generations, which has more than one aspect regarding the current political and economic situations. Poland has been an „emigrate” country since the 19th century, thus by now significant Pole minorities could be found in many European countries. In Hungary, however, westward migration is a new trend since the regime change (1989), which has been strengthening since 2011. The next paragraph will focus on how illiberalism influences westward emigration and workforce in these two countries.

Before we start to examine influences of illiberal democracy, a definition has to be made to understand well this phenomenon: it is a governmental form in which free elections are held but the missing checks and balances and limited civil rights do not give a whole freedom to people.[1] The term was used first in the 1997 article written by Fareed Zakaria, who later, in 2014 (after Hungarian PM Orbán made his infamous statement) described the Hungarian government as a “Putinist” regime (Zakaria, 2014). What Zakaria shows as a bad example through Asian countries, PM Orbán used as an exemplary system.

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<sup>4</sup> Polish, Hungarian, two brothers (in Polish)

### Attributes of emigration

The two „black sheep” of the EU is experienced a continuous emigration tendency since the EU accession (from 2004) and one of its consequences is a rising professional people shortage. Situation of Poland is slightly different from Hungary, because in this country emigration is a more than a hundred years tendency in every young Polish generation (Anne&Izabela&Pawel&Krystyna, 2018) whilst in Hungary this trend has become strong in the last ten years. In both cases mainly the young, educated people leave first, but the problem is not working abroad but staying and starting a new life there. Their no return is causing a loss in sectors like healthcare – in which peoples’ lives depend on the workers. In this section, the examined starting date of emigration is 2012, since labour migration in the European Union between member states was limited until 2011 by countries like Germany or Austria.

The most popular target countries are the United Kingdom and Germany – in these countries a significant Polish minority could be found, and the number of the emigrated Hungarians is rising year by year as well. In EUROSTAT data, where the EU mobile citizens (between the age of 20-64) are examined in other member countries, the rate of Hungarians working abroad in 2009 was 1,5 percent, while in Poland this was 2,7 percent. By 2019 the numbers increased: HUN: 4,5 percent, PL: 4,6. The two rates have become similar by the end of 2019. Must to note: this is only working abroad which does not equate with permanent residence. According to German DESTATIS (Statistisches Bundesamt), Hungarians’ number in the last ten years is show an increasing amount: while in 2012 their number was 107 398, this number had risen to 178 211 and by 2017, 207 035 Hungarians were living in Germany. This data shows only those Hungarians who possess an official German address. The grey workers and temporary workers are not in the statistics; thus the number could be higher than in the data (Bucsky, 2019).

Migration from Poland to westward countries, in first place to Germany and the United Kingdom has shown a regressive tendency since 2016. However, the number of emigrant Polishes is still significant, and their first target place is Germany, the UK is only in the second. In 2012 8399 Polish persons left their home country for permanent residence to Germany, and 4900 to the UK. This number decreased in 2016, when 4437 Polish went to Germany, and the same time their number in the UK was 2946. According to the last available data by Statistics Poland, in 2018 only 4370 Polish headed to Germany, and 2719 to the UK (Statistics Poland, 2019).

As the numbers of the two countries show, in Hungary the emigration tendency is growing, while in Poland it is in a slow regression. What could cause the differences in number while the two country’s government social and political identity are almost the same? The answer is complicated, depending on which fraction is examined, but also could be found in the different governments’ positions. The Hungarian government started ruling the country in 2010 continuously, while PiS has been ruling Poland since

2015. Thus, Hungarians are experiencing a populist right governance for a longer period of time than the Polishes, and in the background of their emigration could be led by political intentions. Following this trade of thoughts, in Poland, emigration as a political opinion-making could not be proven yet.

Although, in Poland, in the last few years immigration by Polish people is a growing tendency, this does not mean that emigration stopped or would not cause problems, especially among young and educated Polish – 40 percent of the young emigrants have graduated. Since the EU accession, around 1,7 million young adults have left the country. The government has taken steps to reduce young emigration; in 2019 the Polish government decided about the cancellation of payroll tax for under the age of 26, whose annual income does not reach 85.000 zloty (~19.290 €). This could affect around 2 million young Polish („Euronews”, 2019).

The Hungarian government has also tried to take similar steps to reduce the young and educated peoples' emigration; in 2015 the Orban administration announced the „Come home, Young!” programm („Gyere haza, Fiatal!), but it ended in 2016 because of its failure, since only 105 young Hungarians chose to move back to Hungary („HVG”, 2016). According to Eurostat, between 2010 and 2018, Hungary had the second strongest emigration wave among the CEE countries. Between 2012-2015, in Hungary the annual average growth of emigration was 23,9 percent, while this number in Poland was – 2 percent – a return has started to the country (Bucsky, 2018).

### Workforce shortage and immigration

Although many Polish return home and the number of emigrated Hungarians is not significantly high compared to other CEE countries, these two countries have started struggling with workforce shortage in the last ten years. As it was mentioned below, Polish favourite destination is Germany and the UK, as well as Hungarians', but beside these two western countries, Austria is also a significant target country to Hungarians. In the neighbourhood country 71 000 (out of 615 000 foreign) Hungarian workers registered, which means every fiftieth employee has Hungarian nationality (Bucsky, 2018). In Poland, the government is trying to ease the workforce shortage with immigrant workers – in 2017 the state gave 235 000 work permits, from which 192 547 were given to Ukrainians. The number of immigrant workers from Ukraine is around 1 million by now. In 2018, Polish employers faced significant workforce shortage, almost 92 percent of them. In 2017, the rate of unfilled posts was higher with 51,1 percent than previous year. According to some forecasts, by 2030 every fifth post would remain unfilled (Gál, 2018). By 2019 in Hungary, the number of unfilled posts was 250 000 – healthcare, processing industry and commerce are among the most affected sectors („Portolio”, 2019).

To summarize correctly how many guest workers could be found in Hungary, adequate data are not accessible unfortunately, hence only assumptions could be made. Many

Ukrainian migrant workers have been choosing Hungary as a target country, but their number is increasing as well as in Poland. According to available information, in 2019 the number of Ukrainian workers was 44 000, furthermore 8 000 Romanian and 2 000 Chinese migrant workers had a job in Hungary, mainly in the building industry (Bozzay, 2020). Migration from both Hungary and Poland is not a new trend, especially not in Central-Eastern Europe – Poland is only the second „emigrant country” in the region, the first place is Romania, but Bulgaria and Slovakia also have notable numbers in emigration. But data not always show the whole truth, since validity depends on the examination of different factors. The mentioned numbers are based on registered information (as social insurance or rents) and the grey zone (undeclared work, family members following each other or cross-border workers) is not counted in these statistics. Thus, real and evaluative numbers are difficult to get. Although both states have rather anti-immigrant, nationalist and populist government which indicates the importance of nations and opposes the idea of the 'United Nations of Europe', Hungary and Poland have to confront the impacts of ageing society and workforce shortage. Furthermore, the two administrations are being criticized by the EU because of constitutional problems which could speed up the emigration causing more significant workforce shortage in their countries. With the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 unemployment rate raised, but since the economic and political situation is not adequate in general to deal with migration issues, and aging society is a growing problem across Europe, workforce shortage seems to remain an inevitable problem on a long-term period.

## How does COVID-19 impact EU mobility?

Globalization and a somewhat close-knit European Union has allowed for mobility within the East Central European region for students of higher education and migrant workers alike, as outlined above. However, the symbolic nature of borders proved to expose a weakness of the union, after COVID-19 first hit Italy at the end of February 2020 („Worldometer”, 2020). Due to our globalized world, the disease quickly became a pandemic and spread to every Member State in a matter of days. How did this affect university students, pursuing their degrees abroad? What was the impact on internal migrants? How does the pandemic influence EU mobility?

One of the first responses from the European Commission was to limit non-essential travel to and within the European Union on 16 March, in order to contain the virus within each member state (European Commission, 2020). Those who were not citizens in their country of residence were allowed to return home. The travel ban was first only issued for 30 days, which then got extended as the virus was still spreading rapidly in April. The measures only started to ease in May, step by step. By that time, non-essential workers, students and the elderly have been socially distancing for two months. The economical consequences of the pandemic are undeniable; however, addressing those effects is

beyond the scope of this current chapter. The focus of this section will be on students and workers who lost their mobility due to the public health crisis. Especially those coming from within the European Union, as internal migration is 2.5 times more prevalent than international migration (KNOMAD, 2020). While COVID-19 is a worldwide issue that has to be treated as such, local outbreaks and the natural borders of the ocean call for local measures and solutions.

According to the Swedish Public Employment Service, (Swedish Public, 2020) the economic crisis that follows the measures taken to contain the virus will have the greatest impact on those who are new to the labour market, i.e. young people and migrants. These vulnerable populations are disadvantaged for many reasons: they might not reside in their home country and have to return, they might not speak the local language, usually they lack relevant professional experience and they might end up being the first ones to be laid off in a situation like this one. First, the circumstances of young people and students will be under scrutiny, then we move onto immigrants.

When most of the European states went into lockdown in March 2020, the Erasmus Students Network saw the rare opportunity of conducting a non-representative study about the experiences of international students scattered around the world (Gabriels&Benke-Aberg, 2020). They were able to survey more than 20,000 students worldwide, from 215 nationalities. While the survey reviewed the perspectives of international students, 81.2% of them were from EU member states, thus providing a good overview of the challenges that they faced and how that affected EU mobility. The first step in containing the virus in higher education was to transition to online education. Holding online lectures, labs and seminars is certainly feasible, the issue was brought by the rapid urge to provide everything online from one day to another. Not to mention that teachers were also stuck at home, juggling work and home life. All in all, a lot of uncertainty surrounded students abroad, after they just started a new semester. Many of them were faced with a difficult decision: staying or returning. According to the study by the Erasmus Student Network, 50.5% of those surveyed in March were still in their exchange locations. However, out of these students, only 41.8% made an active decision of staying in their exchange destination despite the health measures, while 5.2% indicated that they were undecided and 3.6% were unable to return home. Another 7.8% of the students were unable to even begin their exchange experience. This means that 40% of the students decided and were able to return home. It is important to note that the survey was open from the 19th to the 30th of March. As time and the virus situation progressed, more and more students decided to return home.

Evidently, online education and returning to a home country is not the ideal exchange experience, which led to disappointment and stress from the side of the students. First of all, financial hardships were to be expected, as students were unsure if they would receive their Erasmus grant, which already only covers a limited amount of the



expenses. Moreover, students' accommodations usually have to be paid a few months in advance, which is lost if the accommodation is closed down or the student returns home. Additional distress was caused by the lack of access to transportation or medical support.

Then again, even for those who were able to return home, online education did not meet their expectations: their professors were unprepared for this manner, time zone differences were not taken into account, and, overall, this was not the experience that exchange students were looking for. These outlined issues can disrupt the mental health and future prospects of the students. However, as the Erasmus Student Network's survey found, those who returned home actually experienced less anxiety, that can also be due to support from family. On the contrary, this period provided a great opportunity for universities and students' organizations to learn about how to improve their infrastructure to better accommodate distressed students. Erasmus Student Network, for example, realized that adequate information has to be shared with students in English about regulations and health measures, so that they can be up to date about the rules they ought to follow.

In a similar manner, many migrant workers returned to their home countries inside the European Union, which generated many challenges. First of all, the mass movement of workers (and students) within the European Union might have actually contributed to spreading the virus, making it a counterproductive measure in the beginning. Secondly, those migrant workers that were forced to return home after losing their jobs in their country of residence face unemployment in their home countries („International Labour Organization", 2020). On the other hand, those individuals, who managed to keep their jobs, found it harder to commute between their host and home countries, creating mental health problems and affecting intra-EU labour mobility as well (Andriescu, 2020) It can be seen that the European Union-wide public health measures had a significant impact on the lives of internal migrants.

## Conclusion

While globalization and the very principle values of the European Union contributed to the increasing mobility of workers and students as well, within the block's borders, as we have shown, such mobility faces various challenges nowadays. Clearly, the number of Hungarian students and workers who seek to work or study abroad is increasing, and because of the illiberal nature of the current political regime, the trend does not seem likely to slow down or turn around. At the same time, the language education policy in Hungary, and therefore the lack of speaking a foreign language may prevent many Hungarians from making a decision and move abroad. Moreover, this mobility has started to face a new challenge recently. When the European Union closed its borders as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic, supposedly many workers and students left the country of their choice and went back to their home country. Although there is no exact data suggesting the latter yet, future, possibly quantitative research can demonstrate how the pandemic and the measures in the EU affected both the worker and the student mobility and will affect in the long run. The crucial question of the future therefore is whether this crisis leads to a long-term decline of such mobility, meaning that not just workers but also students turn away from universities abroad. Also, while the internal flow of students and workers within the European Union has been taken for granted for decades now, the coronavirus crisis demonstrated how vulnerable these categories of citizens can become, when mobility is reduced or disrupted. Naturally, this health crisis provides an opportunity for learning more about how to care for these groups on the long run, to make their lives easier. The international student network could be supported with more information in English regarding their rights and obligations, while migrant workers could be supported financially in case of a sudden unemployment by their host or home countries.

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