

Marta Pachocka

## The OECD and the twin migration and refugee crises in Europe

Several international stakeholders made their voice heard in the debate on the migration and refugee crises in Europe that peaked in 2014–2015. Frequently their arguments would reduce the challenge of migration to moral and legal obligation of the host countries. In contrast, the OECD, drawing on its vast advisory experience, global outlook and socio-economic profile, offered a more pragmatic policy-oriented approach to both crises and their corollaries. Specifically, the OECD pointed to the demographic and economic opportunities arising from the influx of the large number of migrants to Europe. This notwithstanding, even if the stakes are high, it remains an open-ended question if the OECD member-states will be able to turn these opportunities into sustainable socio-economic benefits.

A noticeable increase in the number of arrivals by sea to Europe was recorded following the outbreak of the Arab spring in late 2010. However, the migration wave reached its peak over the period 2014–2015. In 2015 more than 1.82 million detections of illegal border-crossing along the EU external borders were reported signalling a six-fold increase compared to 2014; many illegal entries were not recorded. Estimates suggest that 3.5 thousand persons lost their life or went missing in 2014 and 3.8 thousand in 2015 while crossing the Mediterranean Sea, as compared to 600 in 2013. Among the increasing numbers of migrants arriving to Europe, the vast majority are people in need of international protection. Only in 2015, 1.3 million asylum applications were submitted in the EU member-states as well as in Norway and Switzerland, marking a two-fold increase since 2014. In a demographic sense it is a migration crisis, i.e. a large-scale inflow of newcomers to Europe over a short period of time. Simultaneously, it is the largest refugee crisis since WW2, i.e. an increasing number of people moving out from their country of origin, or their most recent usual place of residence, to seek international protection.

Since its establishment, the OECD was focused on various aspects of migration. However, the twin migration and refugee crises led to a considerable increase in the OECD's interest in this topic. Indeed, in May 2014 a new policy-analysis series titled *Migration Policy Debates* was launched. Providing a comprehensive overview of recent developments in migration and integration policies in OECD countries, it addressed a variety of migration-related questions. For instance, issues no. 7 and 8 referred directly to the crisis 2014+ in Europe. The issue no. 7 dealt explicitly with the humanitarian dimension of the crisis, while issue no. 8 discussed the impact of the refugee crisis on the European economy.

Simultaneously, the OECD increased the volume of work devoted to the refugee crisis in Europe and the situation of the large number of newcomers in need of protection in its member-states. It was visible in the *OECD International Migration Outlook 2015* and in the publication of *Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015 – Settling In* prepared jointly with the European Commission. The latter report provided the first truly international comparison of the outcomes of integration of immigrants and their children in all EU and OECD countries. In addition, in February 2016 the OECD analysis titled *Financial education*

*and the long-term integration of refugees and migrants* was published. Its findings suggested that the key determinants of success in integrating refugees are their ability to understand and adapt to the host countries' economic and financial systems, as well as their ability to benefit from the existing welfare provisions.

The most valuable of the OECD's contributions to the debate on the 2014+ refugee crisis in Europe has been outlined in 2016 in a volume titled *Making Integration Work: Refugees and others in need of protection* published jointly with the UNHCR. The volume makes a case for ten main policy lessons that can be drawn from the OECD countries' experiences and best practices. The following lessons deserve particular attention. For instance, lesson no. 2 suggests that full access to host countries' labour markets should be offered not only to humanitarian migrants, i.e. those that have been granted a form of international protection, but also to asylum seekers with high prospects of being allowed to stay in a given host country. It is argued that the sooner they become employed, the better they can integrate into the host country's society. If barriers to labour market entry are not removed in respective host countries, the migrants will be prompted to seek illegal employment. In most of the OECD countries, asylum seekers are granted some forms of access to the labour market after a waiting period of 1 month to 1 year. What follows, and this is the message conveyed by lesson no. 5, is that access to labour market for 'humanitarian migrants' does not necessarily mean their successful economic integration. Therefore, employment-related support in host countries is required. In fact, it is a common practice in the OECD member-states to provide it, even if the extent of that assistance varies. Usually it covers job-related and language training.

The OECD represents a strongly policy-focused and result-oriented take to the multi-faceted migration and refugee crises. A thorough examination of the OECD's contribution to that debate leads to the conclusion that migrants arriving to Europe in large numbers in recent years, most of whom are in need of international protection, create an opportunity for improvements in the areas of demographics and economic development in Europe. However, in order to make adequate use of their potential in view of creating mutual benefits for migrants (including refugees) and the host countries, European immigration and integration policies have to be revised and adapted to the new political/legal conditions and economic circumstances that the twin crises trigger. From this perspective, migrants – including refugees – can be considered as valuable demographic and economic assets. That is, following their successful integration into respective societies and labour markets, they can contribute to socio-economic development across Europe. This approach contrasts with arguments frequently raised in the debate on migration that limit the challenge of migration to moral and legal duties of the host countries.

In the context of the twin refugee and migration crises, the OECD plays a very important role in Europe today. Drawing on its more than half a century of international experience and expertise as an actor and an advisory body in the world economy, the OECD has adopted a proactive stance towards the crises already in 2014. Instead of looking at refugees as a threat and being concerned about the costs associated with their influx and stay, it is important to take into account the advantages of their presence for Europe's demographics, economy and policies' design and implementation. Many of today's newcomers are here to stay. Therefore, they will continue to influence the social and economic circumstances in Europe in years and decades to come. That is why further research in this field is needed, followed by its popularization through evidence-based publications and public debate, if the positive ways of addressing the migration-related challenges are to be brought to the surface of the debate and a more constructive discussion at the level of governments can be stimulated.

**Marta Pachocka:** Ph.D., Assistant Professor at the Collegium of Socio-Economics at the Warsaw School of Economics, Poland. Guest lecturer at the University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovakia (2015) and at the University of Tartu, Estonia (2016). Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre d'études européennes of the Sciences Po Paris (2015). Coordinator of the "Jean Monnet Module on the European Union and the Contemporary International Migration – an Interdisciplinary Approach" (2016–2019). Secretary-General of the Board of the Polish European Community Studies Association (PECSA). Her research interests include: the EU and OECD in international relations; socio-demographic changes in Europe/the EU and their consequences; migration and asylum in Europe, EU policy on migration and asylum; European economy.