

Should countries encourage migration today?

By Rebecca Goh (15A14)

The onset of globalisation as a worldwide phenomenon has given rise to the increased ease at which people can enter and exit countries. While generally seen as something to be encouraged at first, the question of migration has been swirling with the recent refugee crisis in Europe. While recognising that being pro-migration may cause countries to become vulnerable to increased competition and potential unrest, I am of the view that countries should encourage migration today. This is namely due to the onset of impending population issues many developed countries face, the need for continued sharing and spreading of technology and knowledge in a fast-paced world, and the responsibility that countries should uphold towards their fellow countries.

Firstly, migration is a key method that governments can employ to solve or alleviate their population crises, which threaten the sustained economic growth they have thus far achieved. Primarily, several countries are now grappling with an ageing population caused by falling fertility rates. A pertinent example of this circumstance would be Germany, which could potentially lose up to 35% of its population in the near future. Such a drastic fall in the population could adversely affect Germany's labour productivity and thus economic growth, which has been outstanding for the last few decades. The uncertain outlook on the global economy, as well as the future of the European market specifically, thus necessitates that Germany strongly consider migration. This serves as an urgent, short-term but sorely needed panacea to its population crisis. The effectiveness of this measure can already be seen by current estimates that Germany would accept about 300,000 migrants this year, as reported by its immigration division. This statistic is consistent with previous years, and could possibly be related to the impressive economic growth Germany has maintained despite the global and European financial crises. Thus, since immigration has already been seen to be effective in promoting the strength of the German economy, it is all the more to be encouraged and even accelerated in the face of Germany's population issues. While immigration can be seen as constructive in solving the problems that countries have to deal with today, emigration is also an effective way to combat a burgeoning population, as seen in China. While China possesses much spare capacity due to its labour-intensive industries, the increase in the number of graduates, which stands at about 9 million annually, has resulted in high graduate unemployment levels, leading these graduates to pursue careers beyond Chinese borders. Migration utility here is two-fold, since receiving countries benefit from increases in skilled labour while pressures on China's value-added tertiary service sectors and professional industries are eased. Therefore, the economic benefits of migration can be evident in both immigration and emigration, demonstrated by the examples of Germany and China.

Beyond solving population crises, migration is also useful for increased proliferation of modern technology and knowledge, especially for developing countries. The success of such a tactic is seen in Singapore, which had opened its doors to foreign investment and foreign firms that brought with them their managers and professionals, with expertise in fields that Singapore wanted to develop. The influx of foreign talent who provided technology training and sharing arguably had a cascading effect on Singapore's population, and enabled Singapore to progress towards employing more capital-intensive methods of production and establish successful service sectors. Immigration of labour from more developed countries thus had a beneficial impact on Singapore's economy, which many developing

countries have sought to emulate. For example, Burma and Singapore are in the process of inking industrial deals, to allow for an influx of skilled labour into Burma in hopes of kick-starting the newly opened-up Burmese economy. Singapore was also involved in the launch of industrial parks in China, such as the Suzhou Industrial park. These initiatives have proven to be useful for successful Singapore firms like Creative, which had brought along their specialists who are in turn able to train Chinese labour on the ground. The positive effects of migration are hence well-recognised, from Singapore's success story, and current attempts to work with other developing countries to lift them up and enable them to enjoy such benefits as well.

However, migration does impact a country beyond its economy; the detrimental effects of migration on a society have been greatly felt as well. For example, the newly elected President of the United States, Republican Donald Trump, has earned support from blue-collar workers by using populist ideas such as blaming Mexican and Asian immigrants for the comparatively high unemployment levels that USA continues to face. The extent of the popularity of such rhetoric demonstrates the strong dissatisfaction and resentment that many workers have towards the immigrant community, for increasing the competition for jobs. Studies have also revealed that increasing immigration rates have had a strong correlation with increased uncertainty about job security and rising income in America. The ubiquity of immigrants being blamed as the culprits for Americans being unable to find jobs implies that it has become a commonly shared viewpoint, which threatens the safety and welfare of the immigrant community. Considering that the permeation of xenophobic sentiments cannot be negated or mitigated by the fact that American unemployment is actually at an all-time low, I believe that migration should be discouraged for the welfare and perceived benefit of both the locals and the immigrants alike, especially when safety threats have actually culminated in a rise in hate crimes against immigrants in the USA. The question of migration has become more pertinent with the humanitarian crises occurring worldwide. Countries faced with this problem should encourage migration, for there is an unwritten but understood social responsibility to assist people forced to flee their home countries. The most prominent example of this is the Syrian refugee crisis that European countries are faced with, with various countries adopting varying degrees of openness. The strongest argument for migration in this context is that governments have an obligation to protect the welfare of people, even if they arrive from other countries. Furthermore, the lack of a better alternative for these refugees puts them in a highly vulnerable state that governments cannot afford to be seen neglecting or even rejecting. Despite fears of increased terror attacks by terrorists pretending to be refugees, France has unequivocally continued to maintain its welcoming stance on the issue, in a bid to uphold the values of freedom of brotherhood. This exemplifies the unquestionable priority of helping victims of humanitarian crises, despite the uncertainty of social outcomes and legitimate security concerns that such a sudden and great increase in immigrants may pose. The gracious, albeit temporal and conditional willingness of Indonesia to allow the setup of Rohingya refugee camps at its borders shows how the compassionate spirit of giving has triumphed, in addressing the dilemma of migration due to humanitarian crises.

Notwithstanding the lofty and admirable ideals that freely accepting refugees advocates, countries cannot be held hostage by the obligation to constantly uphold their social responsibility, especially when already faced with crises at home. For example, Hungary has openly rejected the entry of refugees attempting to enter its borders, and has even erected a razor wire fence so as to deter these refugees and other illegal immigrants. The reason cited for this explicit and outright rejection was the country's perceived inability to support the refugees and successfully integrate them into the Hungarian

society. While touted as an “escapist”, “cowardly” and “easy way out” by critics, it is not unreasonable to limit or prohibit migration, especially in large numbers, should a government evaluate and conclude that its economy and society would not be able to accept and support the undeniable burden that an influx of refugees would impose on the country.

Additionally, governments that could potentially support immigration can also rightly choose to reject it, to prioritise the welfare of their local populations. For example, South Korea has a largely homogenous society, something that the majority of its people wish to maintain. Hence, while not explicitly putting a cap on immigration, immigration rates into South Korea are lower compared to that of less homogenous societies such as the USA. In Singapore, the government has also shifted its previously open stance on immigration, in view of the unhappiness that was stirred up during the General Elections in 2011. In the post-election years, the government has tightened immigration criteria and quotas, and instead pushed to develop a “Singaporean core” in the labour force, guided by skills upgrading programmes such as SkillsFuture. This demonstrates that while migration is a feasible method to solve problems faced by the Singapore society, the government may choose to undertake more long-term initiatives that can negate the effects of an ageing population and consequent falling labour productivity, while appealing to the people’s concerns at the same time. Under these circumstances, where a more holistic and popular approach is available, migration may but be a short term measure that should be replaced.

In conclusion, migration should be encouraged by countries, so as to alleviate domestic socio-economic problems and relieve the humanitarian crises that they face. However, its social effects in particular are questionable, due to the persistent and provocative nature of xenophobic ideas, and the ease with which immigrants can be used as scapegoats for pre-existing social tensions and areas of government inefficiencies. Nonetheless, immigration should only be encouraged by governments confident of their financial ability to incorporate immigrants into society, lest the influx of migrants cause unforeseen problems. Emigration should also only be encouraged by countries that can afford the “brain drain” that would likely result, as it would be highly detrimental for countries that rely on skilled labour and have a small population. It is after all up to countries to ascertain their foremost priorities and juggle both global and domestic realms.

Comments:

A thoughtful discussion which reflects depth in evaluation and awareness of the issue. One point that is questionable is that of the refugees - do we really encourage the immigration of refugees?