

Debate 4

Should borders be open?

considerations by

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0. I will be referring mainly to the international migrations involving Europe, and only to those due to economic reasons.

1. If we try to consider the viewpoints and perspectives of the poor – or poor in relative terms – people and populations as if we were a person or a family living in one of the origin countries, we might wonder what concrete hope, as far as both survival and social and professional promotion - for ourselves and our children - are concerned, we would have other than emigration, both internal, mainly directed toward metropolitan areas (easier, more economical and therefore more feasible than international ones from all standpoints), and international migrations (certainly more difficult and costly, and thus less feasible and practiced, specially by people without education and with negligible financial resources). Between the two kinds of emigration there are both interaction and “competition”.

2. Remaining in the countries of origin we should ask ourselves why so few people emigrate, taking into account:

- the enormous demographic and economic imbalances existing at the macro and micro level
- the dimensions in the countries of destination of the communities who have already immigrated, and the pull effect they have on the populations who have remained in their homeland;
- the cheapness, frequency, and rapidity of the means of transport, which by now connect all parts of the world with the rest of the world;
- the action of the labor traffickers and the triple and often irresistible “alliance” that in fact is created among them, persons ready to do anything to emigrate, and employers

3. When all of this is considered, the conclusion that every potential emigrant reaches when he or she weighs, either consciously or unconsciously, the current situation in his country and that envisaged for the future versus the situation hoped for in the country of destination, it is often so negative that it leads a large number of people to attempt the emigration adventure, perhaps illegally, even at the cost of losing their lives (to give just an example, it was estimated that 4,000

illegal Moroccan immigrants have died in the past five years trying to get to Spain).

4. Of course, not all potential emigrants are able to tackle the costs, difficulties, risks – physical, human, monetary, psychological, affective, administrative – and obstacles posed by destination countries, that emigration is currently relatively little thing when the world population that lives in the economically less developed or transition countries (i.e. that which is largely potentially migrant) numbers around 5.2 billion, whereas in the early 1900s, epoch of great migration flows, the population living outside the Americas numbered only around 1.4 billion, and in particular population living in Europe, including Russia, (the main emigration continent), numbered slightly more than 400 million.

Table 1 - Net Migration: Western Europe, Japan and Western Offshoots, 1870-1998
(000, negative sign means outflow)

Country and area	1870-1913	1914-49	1950-73	1974-98
France	890	- 236	3 630	1 026
Germany	- 2 598	- 304 ^a	7 070	5 911
Italy	- 4 459	- 1 771	- 2 139	1 617
United Kingdom	- 6 415	- 1 405 ^b	- 605	737
Other ^c	- 1 414	54	1 425	1 607
Total Western Europe	- 13 996	- 3 662	9 381	10 898
Japan	n.a.	197	- 72	- 179
Australia	885	673	2 033	2 151
New Zealand	290	138	247	87
Canada	861	207	2 126	2 680
United States	15 820	6 221	8 257	16 721
Total Western Offshoots	17 856	7 239	12 663	21 639

a) 1922-39; b) excludes 1939-45; c) Includes Belgium, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland

Source: A. Maddison, *The world economy: a millennial perspective*, Paris, Development Centre of the OECD, 2001

5. Therefore, if our reasoning considers the problem of international migration as if we were in the sending countries, the answer to the question of our debate – “Should borders be open?”:

- can only be *fully affirmative* from the standpoint of the persons and families, in spite of the costs and risks mentioned earlier and in spite of the uprooting that emigration entails when it is not the result of a totally free and knowing choice;
- could only be *partially affirmative* from the standpoint of their economies and societies, considering that a moderate emigration of workforces and other people presents numerous, and well known, advantages, while a massive emigration, which can reach the dimensions of an exodus, could irreparably impoverish their human capital and definitively compromise their development possibilities.

6. From the standpoint of the rich people and populations, i.e. those of the countries of immigration, in a growing number of cases characterized by a prolonged very low fertility, we might ask for what reasons they should keep their borders open and accept and receive immigrants. The principal reasons are:

- *convenience*, both because immigration flows satisfy their economic and demographic needs, connected to the required support they can give to the economic development and mainly to possible lacks of native labor;
- *necessity*, connected with the impossibility to block the flow, in some cases irresistible, of immigrants, and so it is better to have legal immigrants rather than all illegal ones;
- *of an ethical nature*, reasons which should be the strongest because in that way Europe would have the possibility to “repay” the opportunities it had down through history, even recent, with new worlds to populate and colonies to exploit.

7. If we were in the receiving countries, the answer to the question “Should borders be open?”:

- can only be *partially affirmative* from the standpoint of their economies and societies, and this is especially true when population and economic trends create in the labor market a demand that is not met locally from the quantitative and/or qualitative and/or territorial standpoint. But an immigration that is massive, of heavy, continuous waves, becomes unsustainable from an operational standpoint (mainly jobs, houses, and school) and from the psychological-cultural standpoint due to the difficulty in intensely and quickly “metabolizing” the foreigner because he or she is “different” and because of a fear of losing one's own ethnical-cultural identity. This sense of annoyance, and in some cases fear, with regard to the new ethnic minorities formed by the immigrants is felt more than ever in Europe, not only because of its history and of the history, totally special and often very hard, of its territories and cities, but also because of the fact that it is a continent of old, firm-rooted minorities. Also for these reasons, an “active tolerance” with regard to immigrants is practiced only by a minority of the population, even if it can be positively noted that intolerance is practiced even less (Table 2);

Table 2 - Percentage distribution of attitudes of nationals towards immigrants coming from outside of European Union

Country	Intolerance	Ambivalence	Passive tolerance	Active tolerance
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s was migrations, whereas now, although they can be considered necessary, they cannot be so for the present and the future, even though they may be continuous, sizeable and widespread. The main present and future keystone in the less developed countries, even if not exclusive as was stated earlier, is work: the true challenge