



Conference
Population, Integration and Law:
Implications for Immigration Policy
San Diego, 29 – 30 March 2010

Session: New Modes of Migration Management?

Circular migration and integration:
Squaring the circle?

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Circular Migration: the concept

- ⇒ A **lived reality** in a territorial area that comprises two or more countries: frequent exchanges, symbiotic relationships, people cohabit with a border. ‘Embedded circularity’ (Cassarino 2008)
- ⇒ Circular migration as part of the consolidation of a regional trading bloc. Internal circularity nurtures cohesion and unity, and circularity has contributed to the establishment of the integration area in the first place. Example: European Union.
- ⇒ Circulation at ‘grass root level’ occurs mostly in the context of geographical proximity between source and host countries. As a lived reality, circular migration does not only involve legal migration (example Mexico – United States)
- ⇒ Circular migration as a **policy tool** then detached from geographical proximity



Appearance of the policy tool and EC definition

- ⇒ In December 2006 the European Council addresses the issue of legal migration opportunities for third country nationals, with an emphasis on circular and temporary migration
- ⇒ 16 May 2007: European Commission Communication:
“Circular migration can be defined as a form of migration that is managed in a way allowing some degree of legal mobility back and forth between two countries”
- ⇒ Emphasis is on **legal** mobility and on **managed** mobility.
- ⇒ Elsewhere in the document, the Commission also clearly indicates that this is about **temporary** migration. “...if not properly designed and managed, migration intended to be circular can easily become permanent and, thus, defeat its objective”.



EC definition (cont.)

- ⇒ Two forms of circular migration are included under the EC definition (mobility in two directions)
 - Migrants may move from a third country of residence to a destination country in the EU and then return or move on (privileged mobility between home and host country, but no settlement in the EU)
 - Migrants or members of Diaspora communities settled in the EU may choose to return temporarily to their country of origin or ancestry
- ⇒ Circular migration can concern different types of migrants: seasonal, short-term contracts, students, researchers, trainees



Ambiguity between policy intentions and objective observations

- ⇒ None of the existing definitions of circular migration is applied for the purposes of data collection. Existing migration data relates to temporary, not to circular migration. Available data point towards mobility patterns that become increasingly temporary (e.g. OECD, SOPEMI 2008) but there is no indication in this data to what extent temporary migration is repetitive or circular (Tamas 2009).
- ⇒ Policy intention: circular migration is to benefit all (triple “win”) but current circular migration schemes are not perceived as such by the “participants” (see country studies CARIM project. CARIM = Cooperation project on the social integration of immigrants, migration, and the movement of persons. Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey)



Circular and temporary migration schemes: Similarities and differences

⇒ Similarities:

- Both are generally part of wider cooperation (agreements)
- They share the same objective: temporariness
- Both types of schemes frequently involve an affluent country on one side and a developing country on the other; often high differentials in terms of living conditions, wages, educational attainment of the population, rule of law, etc.. These differentials make it difficult to enforce the temporariness of the schemes.

⇒ Differences:

- **Circular** migration schemes allow for **frequent** temporary stays; **temporary** foreign worker schemes are based on the idea of a **one-time-only** migration
- Circular migration schemes require important financial and logistical resources (e.g. mechanisms / institutions for selecting the migrants, training them and ensuring their return)
- Under circular migration schemes migrants may be offered sort of a 're-entry premium' in the destination country once they return (Cassarino 2008)



Context of adoption of circular migration as a EU policy tool

- ⇒ Belongs to the **flexicurity paradigm** prevailing in the European debate: idea of fragmented work life; native workers have a fragmented working life; migrant workers should probably also have a fragmented stay abroad (Venturini 2008)
- ⇒ Comes out of the logic of the **internal market**. This limits EC competence (emphasis on border controls and less on access to labour markets) and brings an internal perspective (Member States perceive EU action as pertaining to internal matters)
- ⇒ Integration of policies at EU level (**Global Approach to Migration**):
 - Different aspects of migration policy (e.g. regular and irregular migration)
 - Integration of migration issues into EU's geographic and thematic policies (e.g. development cooperation policies) (Cremona 2008)



Context (cont.)

- ⇒ Mobility partnerships / mobility packages: Sending and receiving countries accept mutual obligations
- ⇒ “Mobility packages may be negotiated by the EC with third countries that have committed themselves to cooperating actively with the EU on management of migration flows, including by fighting against illegal migration, and that are interested in securing better access to EU territory for their citizens” (COM (2007) 248 final, of 16 May 2007, p. 3)
- ⇒ “Mobility partnerships will need to take into account the current state of the EU’s relations with the third country concerned as well as the general approach towards it in EU external relations” (COM (2007) 248 final)
- ⇒ Top priority for the EU is enhancing cooperation on readmission (Cassarino 2008)



Result of this context

- ⇒ Internal market perspective plus Global Approach to Migration:

Circular migration as referred to in most contexts where “Migrants may move from a third country of residence to a destination country in the EU and then return or move on” inscribes itself in a development cooperation logic, does not focus on integration of migrants. The latter is “reserved” for long-term resident migrant workers (integration of long-term residents appears in Tampere Conclusions of 1999).

- ⇒ This means further that circular migration and integration only work together, are not a contradiction in the context of the second form of “circular migration” where “Migrants or members of Diaspora communities settled in the EU may choose to return temporarily to their country of origin or ancestry”



Circularity, integration and return

- ⇒ For circular migration to function “properly” (i.e. contribute to development), integration is necessary in both origin and destination countries (transnationalism).
- ⇒ This might work for settled EU migrants (especially for highly skilled workers). But temporary / circular migration does often not provide opportunities for learning. Few incentives for employers to invest in training of short-term employees.
- ⇒ Participating origin countries do often lack any structures to reintegrate returning migrants.
- ⇒ Questions of costs.



Circular / temporary migration as the future norm?

- ⇒ Institutional settings that favour frequent coming and going are likely to lead to **short** stays
Example Malaysia: tolerated migration of Thais in the North favours circular flows with little settling; restrictive policies vis-à-vis of Indonesians in the South leads to longer term stays (Hugo 2003)
- ⇒ If migration becomes perceived by origin countries as a **temporary lending** and by host countries as a **temporary borrowing** of labour for a given (short) period, then the word “migrant” will have to be redefined, and so will traditional information gathering instruments (e.g. population censuses and labour-force surveys that capture mainly settled foreigners). Also, a profound rethinking of migration theory might become necessary as much of this looks at issues such as integration/assimilation, labour market competition, use of welfare systems by migrants – all aspects more relevant to settled foreigners than temporary foreign workers (Venturini 2008)