

Foreword

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According to the United Nations, about 200 million people of the estimated world population of 6.8 billion are international migrants – that corresponds to about three per cent of the total world population. The proportion of international migrants in the global population has increased only marginally in the last 40 years. But, as a result of global population growth, the absolute number of migrants has increased, and their structure and spatial distribution has changed considerably. A structural shift has taken place primarily in the industrialised countries, where less than 20 per cent of the global workers are now living, but where more than 60 per cent of all migrants worldwide reside. Since 1990, more than 16 million people have moved to Germany, while about 11 million have left the country in the same period. Altogether, 15 million people of international migration origin are living in Germany, comprising almost 19 per cent of Germany's current population of 82 million. At the end of 2006, about 64 million people out of Europe's population of 732 million, or nine per cent, lived in a European country they were not born in.

But why does anybody migrate at all? People decide to leave because, in general, they expect to find better conditions and opportunities in other countries or regions.

The most important impetus for migration processes are economic factors. In a microeconomic view, migration flows are influenced by – at least in the context of the Western European receiving societies – short-term cyclical economic conditions, middle-term changes of the production organisation and basic structural settings of the national economies. Political and social factors determine migration flows, as well. These factors can take several forms: from local conflicts between power holders and the opposition or between majorities and minorities, to the general oppression of the population and nationwide human rights abuses. Environmental and climatic conditions can also be initiating factors for international migration processes. However, there are a wide range of environmental conditions that might influence migration, and it is difficult to predict how the future volume of migration may be affected by continuing environmental changes.

Demographic trends influence internal and international migration processes over the long term. In this context, the tempo and the regional spatial distribution

of the population growth are essential parameters. According to the United Nations Population Division, the estimated increase in the world population to more than 8.0 billion people in 2025, and to 9.1 billion in 2050 (under medium variant assumptions), will take place almost entirely in the developing countries, mainly in Africa and Asia. This vast population growth will intensify internal migration in the poorer countries (mainly rural-urban migration), and, as a possible result, will raise the potential for migration to Europe. In addition, this predicted population trend may act as a pull factor in Western European receiving countries, if a long-term population decline results in the lack of an adequate future workforce. These European countries face the question of whether these trends can be addressed by new, rational measures, or if, indeed, higher levels of migration are required.

To answer the question, studying the causes of migration, including the extent to which demographic trends in general, and migration in particular, influence population change, is of the greatest importance. The research group of the Federal Office, in co-operation with the research group “Young Demography” of the German Association for Demography (DGD), hosted a conference with the title “Demographic Aspects of Migration” in Nuremberg, Germany, on 9 and 10 October 2008. Researchers from several countries, as well as representatives from different Federal and State Offices, presented and discussed their research findings. Four topics were the focus of attention: population dynamic aspects of migration, demographic processes of migrants, socioeconomic aspects of migration and processes of internal migration.