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INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS INTO THE LABOUR MARKET IN EUROPE: NATIONAL, ORGANIZATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVES

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FOREWORD

International migration into Europe has become not just a significant example of social mobility but a contentious subject of economic, social and political debate. The numbers involved are uncertain and disputed and there is little agreement on how to define migrants, or on who should be included, or excluded, but it was estimated in 2019 that around 275 million people live outside their home country: an increase of over 50 million in the last ten years (UN international Migrant Stock, 2019). As a proportion of the world’s population, the number of migrants has gone up steadily from 2.8% to more than 3.5% since the turn of the century. The largest number of international migrants reside in just a few countries with the USA, Saudi Arabia, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, Canada and Australia being among the leading locations. But Europe has become one of the major magnets for migrants with Germany having 13 million migrants amongst its total population of 83 million citizens, the UK having 10 million (of 66 million), France 8 million (of 67 million) and Italy 6 million (of 60 million). Indeed, almost every European country now has a significant population of migrants; often of over 10% of the total population.

Around half of all migrants are women and three-quarters of the total number are of working age. They come to another country looking for work, or hoping for work, or in order to take up work. It is this group’s impact on the labour market that is the subject that Sylwia Przytula and Lukasz Sułkowski have asked their distinguished contributors to discuss. Given that it is through work that migrants will make their biggest impact on a society and that it is through work that they can best integrate into society, understanding their integration into the European labour market is an important endeavour.

There are definitional problems. For many people the definitions are reflections of their prejudices (or, as they would probably say, ‘simple common sense’). Migrants are foreigners, often with a different skin colour or religion or different customs from ‘ours’, probably doing low levels jobs, and trying to support, or to gain government support for their large families. (If we find foreigners who are more like us and doing high-level jobs, we call them ‘expatriates’). There is some truth in these stereotypes, but a lot of untruths too. As scholars we have to go beyond these simplistic notions and ensure that we are discussing a coherent and differentiated category of people. The main difference between expatriates and migrants is that expatriates are in a country temporarily, migrants are there to settle: they are there long-term.

Migrants, then, come in all shapes and sizes. Some will be the people who fit the stereotype of being black- or brown-skinned, or a different religion, poor, lowly-educated and prepared to take almost any work. Others will be highly qualified, senior people at the top of their profession, lured to another country to take up a job that they have been recruited for. In between there will be people who have applied competitively for a job in another country, people whose transfer has been facilitated by agencies or middlemen, and people who arrive in a country hoping to find work. And then there are refugees: migrants who have been driven out of a country, rather than chosen to go, and are now in a place they would rather not be. We have to be careful not to confuse these groups; not all migrants
are the same. Whilst many of the chapters in Sylwia Przytuła and Łukasz Sułkowski’s book cover the lower status migrants, there is recognition of the other kinds of migration too.

There are specific issues in Europe. Much of the recent growth in the number of migrants has been of people from outside Europe coming into the continent. But Europe also has a particular, indeed unique, situation where people from any one of the European Union’s nation states have the right to get work in any other state – and as a consequence to settle down there, to buy property there, and to pay all the dues and receive all the benefits of any citizen of that state. Much intra-European migration is not even recorded.

The highly qualified experts that the editors have brought together in this text examine the situation in Europe in detail. They examine policy and practice, they examine the development of language skills and digital support and, taking a wide view of Europe, they examine some dozen or more countries. This is an important book, these are important subjects, and subjects that will have both immediate value and resonance for years to come.

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