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## **Immigration As a Remedy for Population Decline? An Overview of the European Countries**

by Manuela Stranges\*

### **1. Introduction**

The population of the European countries is rapidly ageing, and this process has many social and economic consequences, especially on the labour market of the nations concerned<sup>1</sup>. One of the ways which could be followed in order to address the consequences of the decline in numbers and the ageing of the population is to act directly on the undesired demographic conditions to try and modify them. There are many factors which could drive the attempt to reverse, or at least to restrain, this process, obviously to the extent that it is effectively possible. The demographic means to catch up with the goal of a younger age structure and a higher growth rate than zero are basically two<sup>2</sup>: to increase the fertility or to increase the net migration.

Some authors support the idea that only through an increase of the fertility (also obtained thanks to the institutional commitment of governments) it could be possible to reverse the existing trends, while some others state that immigration can also play a fundamental role in such a sense. Recently in the scientific and academic debate (but also among the politicians) the idea has emerged that migrations can act like a rebalance mechanism of the world-wide population, and that immigrants can validly replace the portions of population missing as a result of the demographic ageing process under way in all the industrialised countries. From an anthropological point of view, the rebalance function of the migrations appears completely natural: migration, in fact, is not a recent phenomenon, but it has constantly accompanied the evolution of the human populations (Chiarelli, 1992).

In the present essay I shall briefly examine the factors in favour and against the view that immigration can be a suitable remedy to the decline of the western populations. I shall start by presenting and analysing the UN Report of 2000 *Replacement Migration: Is it A Solution to Declining and Ageing Populations?*, in which some projections about the future consistency of immigration flows were presented. These inflows are needed by some countries in order to cope with some consequences of the demographic ageing process.

Moreover, jointly analysed data on the demographic ageing and the migratory flows in the European countries, will be provided in an attempt to understand which will be the effects of the increased foreign presence on structure of the receiving, ageing populations. Through a few figures and a short bibliographical review, it will be possible to conclude that immigration, though it could be useful — together with an increase of fertility — it is not sufficient in itself to avert population decline.

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief discussion of the relationship between ageing and labour market, see Stranges 2007 where the focus was on Italy, but with some comparison with the other countries, especially with regard to the critical issues of the labour markets and the achievement of the European targets (Lisbon, Stockholm and Barcelona) by the various countries.

<sup>2</sup> Population ageing is determined by the simultaneous action of two natural factors: low birth rates and longevity. Since to increase mortality at an older age is definitively out of the question, the only factor of the natural dynamic on which it is possible to act is fertility.

## 2. Demographic Trends in the European Union

With the purpose of understanding the specific situation of each country, it can be useful to take a look at data in Table 1, which show some of the most important indicators about the total, natural, and migratory growth and some ageing indicators (composition of each population by age class, ageing index and total fertility rate). Since all data refer to the year 2005, we should have considered only the 25 countries which composed the European Union, while, at that time, leaving out the two new countries (Romania and Bulgaria). To provide a more complete picture I have also shown the values for the two new countries, so that their demographic situation can be compared with that of the other countries.

*Table 1: Main demographic indicators of the European countries (EU25, plus Romania and Bulgaria, 2005)*

Countries	Total population at 1 <sup>st</sup> Jan. 2005 (thousands)	Total growth rate (%) Year 2004	Natural growth rate (%) Year 2004	Migration growth rate (%) Year 2004	Ageing index at 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2005 (%)	Life expectancy at birth (in years)		Total fertility rate Year 2004
						Males	Females	
Italy (a)	58,462.4	9.9	0.3	9.6	137.7	(b) 77.7	(b) 83.7	1.33
Austria	8,206.5	8.1	0.6	7.5	99.4	76.4	82.1	1.42
Belgium	10,445.9	4.7	1.4	3.4	(d) 98.8	(c) 75.9	(c) 81.7	(b) 1.64
Denmark	5,411.4	2.6	1.6	0.9	79.8	75.2	79.9	1.78
Finland	5,236.6	3.2	2.0	1.3	90.9	75.3	82.3	1.80
France	60,561.2	6.0	4.3	1.7	88.6	76.7	83.8	(c) 1.90
Germany	82,500.8	0.4	1.4	1.0	128.3	75.7	81.4	(b) 1.37
Greece	11,075.7	3.2	0.0	3.2	(d) 122.8	76.6	81.4	(b) 1.29
Ireland	4,109.2	20.0	8.2	11.8	54.1	(c) 75.8	(c) 80.7	(b) 1.99
Luxemburg	455.0	7.5	4.2	3.3	76.5	(c) 75.0	(c) 81.0	1.70
Netherlands	16,305.5	2.9	3.5	-0.6	75.7	76.4	81.1	1.73
Portugal	10,529.3	10.4	1.4	9.0	109.0	(c) 74.2	(c) 80.5	(b) 1.42
U. K.	60,034.5	5.6	2.2	3.4	(d) 87.9	(c) 76.2	(c) 80.7	(b) 1.74
Spain	43,038.0	16.2	1.9	14.3	115.9	77.2	83.8	(b) 1.32
Sweden	9,011.4	4.0	1.2	2.8	97.7	78.4	82.7	1.75
<b>EU15</b>	<b>385,383.4</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>(b) 108.7</b>	<b>76.5</b>	<b>82.3</b>	<b>1.35</b>
Cyprus	749.2	25.4	4.2	21.2	62.0	77.0	81.4	(c) 1.49
Estonia	1,347.0	3.0	-2.8	-0.2	(d) 101.3	66.0	76.9	(b) 1.40
Latvia	2,306.4	5.5	-5.1	-0.5	111.5	65.5	77.2	1.24
Lituania	3,425.3	6.0	-3.2	-2.8	88.3	66.4	77.8	1.26
Malta	402.7	7.0	2.5	4.5	75.6	(c) 76.7	(c) 80.7	1.37
Poland	38,173.8	0.4	-0.2	-0.2	78.4	70.0	79.2	1.23
Czech Rep.	10,220.6	0.9	-0.9	1.8	94.0	72.6	79.0	1.23
Slovakia	5,384.8	0.9	0.3	0.5	67.8	70.3	77.8	1.25
Slovenia	1,997.6	0.6	-0.3	0.9	106.3	(c) 72.6	(c) 80.4	(b) 1.22
Hungary	10,097.5	-1.9	-3.7	1.8	100.0	68.6	76.9	1.28
<b>EU25</b>	<b>459,488.4</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>(b) 104.9</b>	<b>75.4</b>	<b>81.7</b>	<b>(b) 1.50</b>
Bulgaria	7,761.1	-5.2	-5.2	0.0	123.9	68.9	76.0	1.29
Romania	21,658.5	-2.5	-2.0	-0.5	92.5	67.7	75.1	1.29

Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurostat, 2006.

Notes: (a) For Italy: Istat, 2006; (b) Estimated value; (c) Provisional value; (d) 2003 values; (e) 2002 values.

The process of population ageing is clear when taking into account the ageing index, measured as the share of population aged 65 and over as against that aged 0-14. Among the EU15, Italy shows the highest value (137.7%), followed by Germany (128.3%), Greece (122.8%) and Spain (115.9%). The average value of the EU15 is 108.7%, higher than the value of the EU25 (104.9%), as a consequence of the lower values of the ten countries, among which only four (Latvia, Slovenia, Estonia and Hungary) exhibit a value higher than 100%. As to the two new countries, while Bulgaria shows a deeper degree of ageing (its ageing index is 123.9%), Romania still has an ageing index lower than 100% (92.5%). Ageing from the bottom (as defined by demographers) is represented by the values of total fertility rates,

under the replacement level of 2.1 children in all the countries, even if some of them improved in the last few years. The highest values are those of Ireland (1.99 children per woman in fertile age), France (1.9) and Finland (1.8), while the lowest are those of Slovenia (1.22) and Poland and Czech Republic (1.23 each). Ageing from the top can be shown by means of life expectancy at birth, which has an average value of 76.5 years for males and 82.3 for females for the EU15 and of 75.4 and 81.7 years respectively for the EU25.

It is interesting to observe (Table 1) the growth rate of the different countries, trying to evaluate the contribution of the two components — natural and migratory. Among the UE15 countries, only Germany shows a negative growth rate, caused by the negative value of the natural growth rate, while there are five for the 10 new countries whose growth rate is negative, all of which also have a negative natural dynamic. The Czech Republic and Slovenia also have a natural rate lower than zero, compensated for<sup>3</sup> by a positive migration growth rate, that brings these two new countries to have a positive total growth rate (even if lower than 1‰). The two newest countries, Bulgaria and Romania, show negative rates for each type of growth, except for the migration rate of Bulgaria which is equal to 0. So it appears that there are some European countries where a positive migration dynamics offsets a negative natural one.

This situation can be easily understood by taking a look at Figure 1, which shows every European country, including Romania and Bulgaria (and average values of EU15 and EU25 as well) for both values. On the graph it is possible to identify four areas:

1. an area of demographic growth (both components), where in 2005 most of the European countries lie, even if in different positions;
2. an area of natural growth and negative migratory growth, where only the Netherlands can be found, which has a slightly high natural population growth rate (3.5‰), but a negative, though little, migration growth rate (-0.6‰);
3. an area of natural decline not compensated for by migration, where we find four countries, all belonging to the ten new ones (Latvia, Lituania, Estonia, Poland), and Romania;
4. an area of natural decline compensated by migration, where we only find Germany from the EU15 and three countries from the ten new ones (Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovenia).

Bulgaria lies exactly on the X axis, having a migration net rate equal to 0, but a negative natural growth rate (-5.2‰).

From the observations of the simple figure proposed, it is possible to highlight that for most of the European countries both the natural and the migration growth rate are positive, even if the first component is actually very slightly positive. The real problem, therefore, is not the simple arithmetical contribution that net migration can give to the whole growth of the population if the natural growth is negative, but how immigration can redress the balance among the different age-groups within the single populations. The population ageing process is caused, in fact, by two factors: the low birth rate and the increase in the life expectancy. By definition, a population begins to decline when its net reproduction rate starts to go below 1, which is the level at which every generation exactly replaces itself<sup>4</sup>. The main problems caused by this process are the missed replacement among the working classes and the progressive reduction of the share of the working subgroup among the entire population. For these reasons, many authors are trying to reflect on the role that immigration can have by strengthening the labour force and trying to compensate for the unbalance among the productive and non-productive groups.

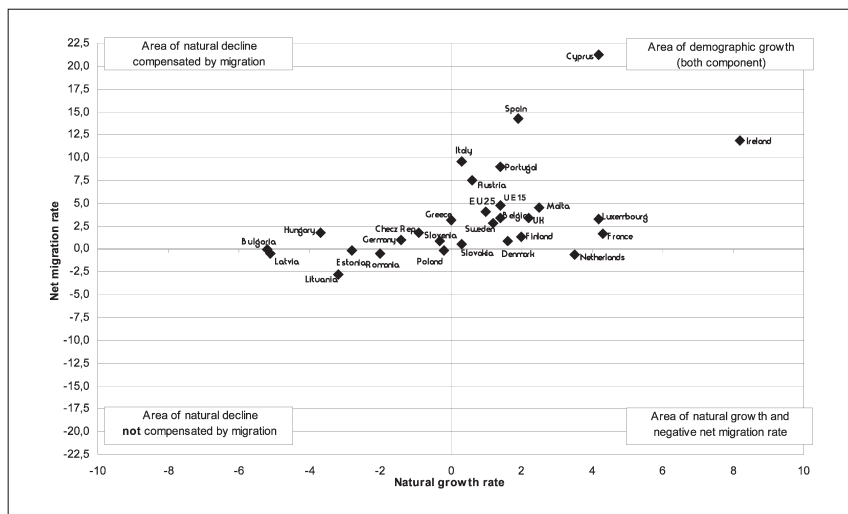
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<sup>3</sup> Compensation is here intended from a merely arithmetical point of view.

<sup>4</sup> The net reproduction rate is the exact number of daughters for each mother at net of the probability of dying during the fertile interval (15-49 years).

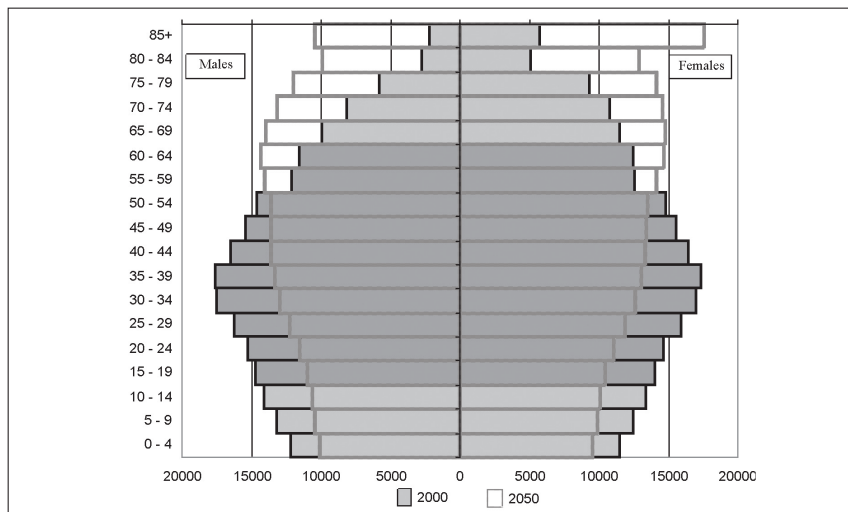
The ongoing ageing process in the European countries will change the demographic shape of the Union, as can be seen in Figure 2, which shows the age and sex distribution of the total EU25 population, comparing the profile of 2000 with that of 2050. The profile of the pyramid was reductive in 2000, which means that the youngest portions of population were less than the central ages, while it will tend to be stationary in 2050, which means that the population has the same amount of people in every class (even if it is possible to notice that, as an effect of the low birth rate, the base of the pyramids still remain smaller than the rest). Furthermore, it is possible to appreciate that the strongest reduction will concern the working population (aged 15-64), as shown by the pyramid in a darker colour, while there will be a parallel increase of the share of population aged 65 and over, especially females due to their higher life expectancy.

Figure 1: European countries per values of natural and migratory growth rates (2005)



Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurostat, 2006.

Figure 2: Population pyramids for the EU25. Values in thousands. Comparison between 2000 and 2050



Source: Author's calculations based on OECD, 2007.

### 3. The Role of Immigration in Slowing Down the Ageing Process

As I showed with the two figures in the last sections, Europe is rapidly ageing: there are no countries with a Total Fertility Rate higher or equal to the replacement level. Since all the projections show no turning back in the level of fertility, considerable attention has been given to the so called replacement migration, a term which refers to “[...] *the international migration that would be needed to offset possible population shortages, i.e. declines in the size of population, the declines in the population of working age, as well as to offset the overall ageing of a population*” (United Nations 2000, p. 5).

The attempts to estimate the exact amount of immigrants required to let the European countries maintain their current level of population, age indexes and activity or employment rate, have been manifold, but most of them led to the conclusion that immigration flows should rise to huge, unsustainable levels. In the next pages I shall briefly examine the already cited UN Report of 2000 and one of the latest of these studies (Feld, 2006). Since the UN Report was strongly criticised, I shall of course examine a few of these critiques, which allowed me to conclude that, even if it can have a certain role, immigration alone is not sufficient to reverse or just to slow down the ageing process.

#### 3.1 Replacement Migration According to the UN Report

Since the European populations started to decline, there have been many studies about the role that immigration can play to reverse or just slow this process. Some researchers showed that population size could only be maintained by the possible replacement of the original population by the immigrant one (Steinmann and Jaeger, 2000; Coleman, 2000; Shaw, 2001). However, some previous work (among the others Lestheaghe, Page and Surkyn, 1988; Wattelaar and Roumans, 1996; van Imhoff and Keilman, 1996) had already shown that only extensive and increasing levels of immigration could preserve the age structures and the potential support ratios of developed populations, necessitating the population to grow to an exceptional size, almost without limit (Coleman and Rowthorn, 2004, p. 594).

Although the debate about the role of immigration had already started many years ago, with the publishing of the United Nations Report of 2000, it reignited. The figures showed by the Report (some of which will be provided later) divided the researchers into two groups: those who agreed with the results of the report, stating that immigration will have to rise at unprecedented levels, and those who maintained that the estimates proposed by the UN were absolutely unrealistic.

The UN Report was built on a medium variant of the 1998 Revision of the United Nations World Population Prospects (United Nations 1999a, 1999b, 1999c), and showed six different scenarios, which can be summarized as follows (UN, 2000, p. 15):

1. Scenario I: based on the simple medium variant of the 1998 Revision.
2. Scenario II: based on the medium variant of the 1998 Revision, amended by assuming zero migration after 1995.
3. Scenario III: computes and assumes the migration required to maintain the size of the total population at the highest level it would reach in the absence of migration after 1995.
4. Scenario IV: computes and assumes the migration required to maintain the size of the working-age population (15 to 64 years) at the highest level it would reach in the absence of migration after 1995.
5. Scenario V: computes and assumes the migration required to prevent the ratio of the size of the population aged 15-64 to the size of the population aged 65 or over, called the



potential support ratio (PSR), from declining below the value of 3.0.

6. Scenario VI: computes and assumes the migration required to maintain the potential support ratio (PSR) at the highest level it would reach in the absence of migration after 1995.

According to these scenarios, it was estimated what will have to be the total and annual net number of immigrants required in the different countries considered in order to achieve the expected goals. Four European countries were considered: France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. Also the values for the whole EU15 have been estimated. Table 2 summarises the results of this application. For all the scenarios it is always Germany, among the four European countries, to require the highest average annual number of immigrants. Excluding scenario VI, which was formerly declared unrealistic<sup>5</sup> by the United Nations itself, the hypothesis for which it seems to be the highest required immigration is the fifth, shaped to maintain the ratio between 15-64 and 65 and over population higher than 3.0. According to such a scenario immigration flow should be equal to 292,000 a year in France, 736,000 in Germany, 638,000 in Italy and 249,000 in the United Kingdom. For Italy, for instance, the total number of migration to achieve the goal of this scenario should be over 35 million, which is a value equivalent to 61.4% of the actual 57 million inhabitants.

*Table 2: Net number of migrants required for each specific scenario by country. Values in thousands (1995-2050)*

Country	Scenario					
	I Medium variant	II Medium variant with zero migration	III Constant total population	IV Constant age group 15-64	V Ratio 15- 64/65+ not less than 3,0	VI Constant ratio 15- 64/65+*
<i>Total net number of immigrants</i>						
France	525	0	1,473	5,459	16,037	93,794
Germany	11,400	0	17,838	25,209	40,481	188,497
Italy	660	0	12,944	19,610	35,088	119,684
United Kingdom	1,200	0	2,634	6,247	13,674	59,775
Europe	23,530	0	100,137	161,346	235,044	1,386,151
European Union	16,361	0	47,456	79,605	153,646	700,506
<i>Average annual number of immigrants</i>						
France	10	0	27	99	292	1,705
Germany	207	0	324	458	736	3,427
Italy	12	0	235	357	638	2,176
United Kingdom	22	0	48	114	249	1,087
Europe	428	0	1,821	2,934	4,274	25,203
European Union	297	0	863	1,447	2,794	12,736

Source: United Nations, 2000. \* Scenario VI is considered to be unrealistic.

Estimates based on the third scenario show that “[...] for France, UK, US and the European Union, the numbers of migrants needed to offset population decline are less than or comparable to recent past experience. While this is also the case for Germany and the Russian Federation, the migration flows in the 1990s were relatively large due to reunification and dissolution, respectively. For Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Europe, a level

<sup>5</sup> The scenario is defined unrealistic since it would, for example, require over than a billion and three hundreds millions of immigrants. This would mean take all China inhabitants and bring them all in Europe.



of immigration much higher than experience in the recent past would be needed to offset population decline” (United Nations, 2000, p. 93). Moreover, in the report the number of migrants required to offset the decline in the working-age population appears considerably higher than that needed to compensate total population decline (United Nations, 2000, p. 94).

Taking a look at Table 3, we can appreciate what these figures would mean in terms of composition of population among natives and foreigners and their descendants. Data refer to the percentage incidence of migrants and their descendants over entire population at the end of the projection period (2050). Obviously these figures reflect the results in Table 2, so that scenario V seems to be the one which would modify the most the composition of the original population achieving a percentage of foreigners of the first and following generations equal to 40.2% in the EU15, 32.8% all over Europe. Among the four European countries Italy shows the highest value of percentage incidence in all the scenarios (53.4% in the fifth), except for the first, according to which it is Germany that has the highest value (19.8%).

So it appears that, even if United Nations defined only the sixth scenario as unrealistic, all of them actually lead to an unexpected, huge amount of immigrants, with all the attendant social and economic concerns that this would arouse.

*Table 3: Percentage incidence of post-1995 migrants and their descendants in total population in 2050, by scenario and country.*

Country	Scenario					
	I Medium variant	II Medium variant with zero migration	III Constant total population	IV Constant age group 15-64	V Ratio 15- 64/65+ not less than 3,0	VI Constant ratio 15- 64/65+*
France	0.9	0.0	2.9	11.6	27.4	68.3
Germany	19.8	0.0	28.0	36.1	48.1	80.3
Italy	1.2	0.0	29.0	38.7	53.4	79.0
United Kingdom	1.9	0.0	5.5	13.6	25.3	59.2
Europe	4.3	0.0	17.5	25.8	32.8	74.4
European Union	6.2	0.0	16.5	25.7	40.2	74.7

Source: United Nations, 2000. \* Scenario VI is considered to be unrealistic.

### 3.2 Some Critiques to the UN Report on Replacement Migration

The United Nations Report aroused a series of discussions about the role of migration and the reliability of their own estimate. Since the estimated figures seem difficult to believe, in particular for some specific scenarios, many others have criticised the assumptions, the methodologies and the results. Some authors, for instance, noticed that in the Report the judgement about population decline and ageing seems to be too negative and also that the Report itself seems to be completely disengaged from the previous debate about the role of migrations (Saczuk, 2003, p. 5).

Other focused on the fact that the model calculations made by the United Nations were limited to a demographic analysis, which have the aim to show the size of necessary replacement migration from a ‘population numerical’ point of view (Cichon *et al.*, 2003, p.2). In particular, in the empirical application in Cichon *et al.*, the three authors tried to estimate the amount of migratory flows required to maintain a certain per capita GDP growth level, considering this indicator as a proxy of the living standard. The basic consideration of their

work is that what needs to be taken into account is the labour force participation, since “[...] if recent per capita growth levels are the declared target, then replacement migration would lead to a total population in Europe — without a change in labour force participation of the original population — that would simply explode”, (Cichon *et al.*, p.2).

Other critiques to the UN Report can be found in Espenshade (2001), who focused on its supposed arbitrariness and too narrow perspective. According to the author, the figures shown in the report arise no surprise, since they are based of those assumptions. In particular, Espenshade noticed that the UN Report does not refer to the existing literature on the argument and that it is based on a purely demographic approach which does not take into any account the previous studies from other fields, like economics, sociology and so on (p. 387).

Substantial critiques came also from Coleman (2000), especially for the founding of the Report about the United Kingdom. In particular, the author disapproved both the assumptions and the projection methodologies used. Tapinos (2001) underlined that the set of technical assumptions on which the UN simulations contained in the Report rest strongly influence the results. As many other scholars have already pointed out, he emphasised that the approach is too strictly demographic, based only on numbers and age distributions<sup>6</sup>. In 2005, Feld noticed that the scenario fixing the immigration level required to avoid total population reduction is the only one which could be considered realistic for every country, with a level of immigration annual flow just slightly higher than the level of the ten years before the publishing of the Report.

### 3.3 An Estimate of the Replacement Level of Migration in Order to Achieve Lisbon's Target

After the UN report there have been several others efforts to estimate the levels of required immigration to face the ageing process, especially with regard to the labour market rather than to the population itself. Among the others I shall briefly present a Feld's application<sup>7</sup> (2006), for the countries belonging to the EU15 which is based on a simple, although effective, methodology. Firstly, the author proposed some estimates of the labour force trends, combining the Eurostat baseline demographic hypothesis with the median scenario with a small rise appearing in the labour-market participation proposed by Eurostat<sup>8</sup> (Feld, 2005). After that the author provided an evaluation of the employment levels in the examined countries, by considering the total employment rates and their absolute deviation from the Lisbon target (which requires a total employment rate equal to 70% for 2010). He also estimated the annual increases rate of the total employment necessary to meet the Lisbon requirements.

Secondly, he calculated the migrant labour force flow in 2010, reaching an estimate of the number of migrants needed to meet the 70% employment rate. In the following Table 4, I report the main results of Feld's application. As the author himself declared, the figures obtained through his application are impressive (p. 25): for the whole EU15 the number of migrants required to achieve the Lisbon target is over 43 millions, which correspond to a total

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<sup>6</sup> “[...] The dependency ratio is conventionally defined as the ratio of persons aged 15-64 to those aged 65 and over. Permanent immigration is assumed, with a constant age structure of net migration. In the absence of data for return migration and hence for net migration, the simulations use the observed age distribution of entrants and assume that all of them settle permanently. Hence return migration is assume to be nil. Nevertheless, some estimation for France and the United-States shown that they represent an important percentage of total inflows. Migrants are assumed to have the same fertility and mortality rates as the native-born. Furthermore, with the simulation technique used, it is not possible to calculate the proportion of foreign-born individuals at the projection horizon, but only the proportion of persons who entered the country of reception after the projection base year (1995) and their descendants, most of whom were born in that country. These proportions are not comparable with those of foreign-born individuals observed in the projection base year”, (Tapinos, 2001, p. 9).

<sup>7</sup> This is actually not the first application of the author about immigration flows and labour market. Among the others, interesting is that contained in Feld (2005).

<sup>8</sup> The author himself tries to prepare to possible critiques to his theoretical assumptions by saying that: “[...] The choice of these two median combinations may be debatable but it allows the presentation of a range of sufficiently reliable probabilities thanks to which alternative hypotheses can be formulated”, (Feld, 2006, p. 15).

employment increase of 26.1% compared with the number of working-age adults actually at work in 2010. The proportion of additional input of working immigrants is extremely variable from one country to the other, varying from a minimum of 2% in Sweden and 4% in Germany to a maximum of 82% in Italy.

From Feld's estimates it appears that two groups of countries (Feld, 2006, p. 28) clearly exist: those that will have no difficulty in achieving the objective of a 70% employment rate (Austria, Denmark, Netherlands, Portugal, United Kingdom) and those for which the achievement of the Lisbon target seems to be impossible (all the others). For the first group of countries there is no need to increase immigration flows, while for the second even huge additional migrant flows will not be a solution for the decline, since, as the estimates showed, they will not be able to achieve the objective anyway<sup>9</sup>.

*Table 4: An estimate of migrants needed to meet the Lisbon target in 2010 (70% total employment rate)*

	Total employment rate		Labour force		Number of migrants needed to meet the 70% employment rate		
	Employment rate in 2000 (%)	Annual increases rate needed to meet Lisbon target in 2010 (%)	Employment rate in 2000 (%)	Migrant labour force flow in 2010	Percentage of the total labour force in 2010	Absolute number	Percentage of increase employed population in 2010
Austria	68.5	0.27	71.1	11,373	0.28	-	-
Belgium	60.5	1.84	59.8	6,944	0.29	2,344,830	57
Denmark	76.3	-	76.4	5,941	0.17	-	-
Finland	67.2	0.51	63.8	2,545	0.20	727,130	32
France	62.1	1.51	64.1	25,793	0.17	7,950,230	31
Germany	65.6	0.81	69.1	105,683	0.11	1,604,000	4
Greece	55.7	2.90	59.5	11,890	0.09	2,485,830	59
Ireland	65.1	0.91	64.3	2,693	0.26	534,130	29
Italy	53.7	3.37	56.2	36,385	0.13	17,360,500	82
Luxembourg	62.7	1.39	60.8	986	0.17	96,830	51
Netherlands	72.9	-	70.1	19,976	0.48	-	-
Portugal	68.4	0.29	70.3	12,420	0.25	-	-
Spain	56.2	2.78	58.5	28,044	0.24	10,261,270	65
Sweden	73.0	-	69.6	10,171	0.13	74,700	2
United Kingdom	71.5	-	72.1	39,098	0.23	-	-
<b>UE15</b>	<b>64.3</b>	<b>1.07</b>	<b>65.3</b>	<b>319,942</b>	<b>0.18</b>	<b>43,439,450</b>	<b>26.1</b>

Source: calculations based on Feld, 2006, p. 17 and p. 24.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks: A Few Reasons Why Immigration Alone Is not Sufficient

The UN Report on replacement migration briefly described in the previous pages focuses only on the size of the immigration flow required to avoid population decline, without taking into any account the composition of the population. Niessen and Schiebel (2002) noticed that: "[...] While now there is a greater acknowledgement of the need for immigration, numbers are still a sensitive issue", (p. 14). An important matter to take into account is that of the composition of migration flows, which implicitly refers to the degree of selectivity which is possible or advantageous to have when handling immigration. In order to have the highest

<sup>9</sup> "[...] It has been shown that even with 100% of the migrant flow actually employed, the size of the flows needed is too great for them to be economically and socially absorbed", (Feld, 2006, p. 28).

profit from immigration we should think of selecting only working-age immigrants and also select them on the basis of the specific skills that are lacking in the labour market. Such a kind of fine-tuning policy is impossible to implement (Punch and Pearce, 2000, p. 107). Regarding this aspect a wide variety in migrant flow nature, composition and level of qualifications can be noticed for Europe<sup>10</sup>, according to the receiving country (Feld, 2005).

Some others also noticed that immigration cannot solve all the difficulties connected to the crisis of the social system because if it is true that it reduces the percentage of the retired over the entire population (since the migrants have an average age much younger than the receiving population), it is also true that it raises the percentage of children<sup>11</sup>. So the net effect of immigration on the percentage of potential contributors to the social system could be very little (Steinmann, 1991).

Another question to be considered is that immigration can be valid for a short period, but when considering its effect in slowing the ageing process, it must be taken into account that immigrants also age. So the effect of the young presence is strictly temporary. Existing immigrant populations in Europe have a relatively young age structure, with a the median age of new immigrants on average about 30 years, while the median age for the overall OECD population is almost six years higher, around 36 (Niessen and Schiebel, 2002, p. 14). Furthermore, while it is proved that the fertility rates of the immigrant women are usually higher than those of the receiving country, many studies also stress that their fertility tends to converge more or less rapidly on the levels of the host country (Gauthier, 1988, 1989; Ram and George, 1990; Krishnan and Krotki, 1989; McNicoll, 1995; Legros, 2003).

McNicoll talked about the convergence that in the long run occurs between the demographic characteristics (mortality and fertility) of the immigrant population with those of the natives, but also emphasised that the convergence in the distribution of the economic status and in the mobility models, where both the cultural factors and the discrimination can play an important role, could be much slower (McNicoll, 1986, p. 229). McIntosh noticed that reopen the doors to mass immigration is widely rejected on the base of the fact that the social and political costs are higher than the relative advantages of an enlargement of the labour force and a more substantial contributive base (McIntosh, 1991, p. 318).

Some other authors are, finally, worried about the effect that immigration may have on the cultural, racial, linguistic and ethnic composition of the receiving countries (for example, Teitelbaum and Winter, 1985). According to those scholars, if the proportion of aliens exceeds a certain level, in fact, there can be serious social risks for the hosting population. To increase the fertility, therefore, the only course to take seems to be to try and stop, slow down, the decline of the European populations. Twenty years ago Espenshade (1987, p. 258) already noted that many scholars seriously doubted that an immigrative solution could prove to be politically acceptable in order to alleviate the fears of the decline of the population.

So it appears from the few figures reported here and the bibliographical review conducted that immigration cannot be the only remedy for population decline. To count only on immigration to solve the demographic problems of Europe is not possible, and it is seriously dangerous for its populations. Although it is clear that an immigration policy is necessary, even if the UN Report brought to unbelievable and unrealistic levels of immigration, the

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<sup>10</sup> The author noticed that there are great differences among the European countries about migrants labour force participation, unemployment and education levels which can be explained by historical factors and specific admission procedures. Particularly, he mentions the case of education levels: in certain countries, the proportion of university-trained foreigners is very small (4% in Portugal, 9% in Italy and in Austria), while it is much higher in other countries (20% in Finland, 21% in the United Kingdom and 29% in Sweden). These disparities obviously influence integration policy priorities and procedures. (Feld, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> It should be noticed that if pensions for old people represent only a cost for society, the expenses connected to the children must be considered as an investment in human capital.

scenarios<sup>12</sup> should be considered as purely hypothetical, but still useful to clarify and quantify the demographic situation in the different countries (Feld, 2005). Many simulations (among others see Moretti, 2002 for Italy) showed that even with consistent migratory flows, the population would decrease if the Total Fertility Rate is not above a certain level. Hence, fertility remains the key factor to the process population ageing, and consequently, the factor on which political efforts should also concentrate.

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<sup>12</sup> These scenarios should not be confused with variants of the ‘global population forecasts’, which are considered to be realistic (Grinblat, 2003, p.97).



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