

European paradox on migration

An agreement on cross-Channel migration was presented on Thursday, July 10, 2025 by French president Emmanuel Macron and British prime minister Keir Starmer (1). A pilot project called "one in, one out" provides for the return to France of people illegally arrived in Great Britain aboard "small boats". The objective is to fight against human trafficking by smugglers who supply this material to exiles often denied asylum, entrenched in unsanitary camps, which have caused hundreds of deaths by drowning in recent years in the Channel. A new and legal route for immigration to the United Kingdom is suggested by asylum and family reunification. France will receive an amount exceeding the 760 million euros already paid by the United Kingdom to ensure its role as a police officer of the British border. This system was established by the Sangatte agreements in 2000 and then the Touquet agreement in 2003, complemented by the Sandhurst treaty of 2018. France undertakes to take back illegal exiles who do not qualify for asylum or family reunification. This return is important for Prime Minister Keir Starmer faced with a rise in xenophobic violence, fueled by far-right movements. Brexit did not 'settle' the migration issue; on the contrary, it worsened it.

In all European countries, we observe a growing popularity of populist, nationalist and anti-migration movements while Europe will not be able to face increased economic competition in a hostile international environment without the vital contribution of foreign labor. The European paradox is eloquent. Faced with an ageing Europe with a growing rate of inactive people and continuously declining fertility rates, European countries need foreign labor. Immigrant workers fill the vacancies left by nationals and contribute to financing social protection through their work. A report published in May 2025 by the Terra Nova Think Tank, written by Hakim El Karoui and Juba Haddadem, associated experts and economists, focused on the migration issue from the perspective of the labor market (2). Their approach is scientific, without pathos or indignation, based on official figures published by Eurostat or INSEE.

Immigrants do not compete with national workers, criticism formulated both by the extreme right (anti-migration parties demanding a national preference) and by the extreme left (immigration would be a weapon of the bosses to exploit workers). Immigrant worker are used as a labor market adjustment. The remark applies both to highly qualified positions (such as doctors, 20% of whom graduated abroad) and to low-skilled missions (typical sectors of cleaning, personal assistance or security...). The so-called activities in tension are those where the vacant positions and recruitment needs are superior to existing candidates and skilled professionals. Companies are facing chronic recruitment crises for these candidates with so-called "career" profiles. In 2023, the three most critical professions are technicians and control agents of financial and accounting services; doctors; technicians and general control agents and industrial mechanics. 'Essential' workers are often immigrants. The authors of the report listed the sectors where they are most indispensable – in industry (machining equipment, boiler-making, sheet metal work); care and assistance to the person (care professions), IT, catering, road transport, security and surveillance

In a reasoning by the absurd, an alternative, a France without immigration would lose inhabitants (negative natural balance with a number of deaths higher than births) and have fewer

children (the fertility rate of immigrant women is higher than that of French women). To maintain a population support ratio, France needs the arrival of 250 to 260,000 new immigrants per year. A key dimension concerns the financing of pensions - the ratio between active and inactive has continued to decline. Even if the retirement age were postponed, it would not be enough to balance the ratio. Immigrant workers do not only take care of elderly people (doctors, nurses, carers...), they allow retired people who are still autonomous to fully benefit from their retirement

The phenomenon is general in Europe. The authors of the report by French Think Tank Terra Nova foundation cite the results of the Bertelsman foundation – without immigration, the German workforce would lose 5 million workers. In all countries where nationalist and xenophobic parties win voters, the public authorities must face reality and regularize undocumented persons or increase their work permits. In Germany, the AfD party is increasingly popular. The migration crisis of 2015 was blamed, yet even in 2021 the German government had to adopt laws open to foreign workers. The same thing happens in Spain despite the rise of Vox. Even countries with governments hostile to migration are forced to open up - Poland issued 500,000 worker permits in 2021 despite the anti-migration party PiS or Victor Orban's Hungary being forced to relax its migration rules. In France, employers are calling for more flexibility, particularly entrepreneurs in activities under pressure, to be able to regularize undocumented employees. More surprising, the Catholic Church of France published on Friday, August 15, 2025 the results of a study – 30% of priests would be of foreign origin (mostly from Africa but also from Asia or Latin America). The authors of the Terra Nova report cite a lower figure (20%) probably older, so the trend has intensified.

In a famous parable published in 1819 (3), French author Saint Simon imagined a world without all those who contribute to the wealth of the country - scholars, industrialists, artists and "workers" of all categories. His conclusion was the same as the authors of the Terra Nova report for immigrant workers - France would be doomed to disappear because it would lose the vital forces of its economy, its research, its culture... Brexit is the most striking example. Eurosceptic and nationalist parties have instrumentalized the migration issue. They continue to stir up xenophobic hatred while the exit from Europe has shrunk their country, caused shortages of certain goods and recurring recruitment crises in essential sectors (the same as in France).

In "The Art Being of happy" (4), German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer advocates to "open doors and windows to good mood, no matter when it is decided to come". Europeans since 1957 with the European Union have built a haven of peace in stages - a common market based on freedom of movement (capital, goods and services, and people) then a common money, together with common rules to be followed. Pour European model is attacked by authoritarian and nationalist parties or countries. The EU cannot fold in on itself – let's frankly open doors and windows to exiles....

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- (1) Editorial « Migrants : un accord politique entre Paris et Londres », Le Monde, samedi 12 juillet 2025
- (2) Kakim El Karoui et Juba Haddadem « Les travailleurs immigrés : avec ou sans eux ? », Fondation Terra Nova, 12 mai 2025 -

https://tnova.fr/site/assets/files/70453/terra_nova_-_travailleurs_immigres_-_12_05_25.pdf?1wgwz3

(3) Parable by Henri de Saint Simon (1819)-

https://www.wikiberal.org/wiki/Parabole_de_Saint-Simon

(4) Arthur Schopenhauer « The art of being happy » (*Die Kunst, glücklich zu sein*), 1814-1818, Dresde (Germany)