

BOOK REVIEW

Sarah Spencer, *The migration debate*

The Policy Press, University of Bristol, 2011, 278 pages, ISBN 978 1 847422859

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The migration issue is a debatable one not only from a theoretical point of view but from the policy options as well. The progress in explaining various aspects of international migration such as migration strategy, from individual to family strategy, the way of entering the new country, from “chain” to “network migration” and trans-nationality etc. has not always been followed by the most appropriate policy options. Because of political interest, policy makers are more sensitive to the public opinion perception on migration than to the scientific opinions concerning the balance between advantages and disadvantages of migrants’ presence.

Each country has a certain experience of migration, either as the sending, transit or as the receiving country, as well as specific forms of managing the process. Some countries have a culture of migration and are more open to newcomers; others are more conservative and rather suspicious with regard to the presence of foreigners. Economic, social and political conditions are also important factors which may explain attitudes and policy options.

The UK has a rich experience in migration, which came from its history and, similarly to other developed European countries, from the new “push and pull” factors in favour of migration during the last 2-3 decades.

The *Migration Debate* by Sarah Spencer is a valuable contribution to one of the most relevant debates nowadays – the migration phenomenon, with a special focus on the UK. The in depth analysis of the policy making of migration is finely accompanied by policy recommendations for future reforms on the matter. The author is Deputy Director at the Center of Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), University of Oxford, and a Visiting professor at the Human Rights Center, University of Essex.

The book comprises 7 parts: from an introductory part (a comprehensive review of migration policy in the 21st century), to the analysis of asylum and refugee policy (part 2), going through the important forms of migration for work

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and study (part 3), migration for family reunification (part 4) and irregular forms of migration (part 5). The controversial issues of integration and citizenship are analyzed in part 6, while the last section gathers the main conclusions.

The introductory chapter offers an essentially clarifying analysis of the context in which the UK case of migration policy is to be debated. The author draws attention to the competing objectives of this policy, to the accurate significance of some statistics, and also on the free movement right. Policy makers, states the author, fail to achieve objectives because the policy is not based on the correct understanding of the dynamics of migration (decision to migrate, structural causes and social networks).

Despite public pressure and authorities' efforts to control – mainly to limit- the migration inflows in the UK, a growing number of people are moving from their countries of origin in search for better opportunities abroad. The UK is now facing a *super diversity* that asks for a sound policy focused on inequalities and discrimination. In the author's opinion, in order to gain public support for reforms in migration policy we need to explain migration peculiarities, policy constraints and the rationale behind authorities' actions. The author underlines that the domestic policy is also to be developed under constraints of the international and European law in the Human Rights field, and free movement of EU citizens.

The second chapter of the book reveals the reluctance, even widely spread fear in the UK of the less fortunate ones seeking asylum and protection. The author also refers to the semantic relevance of the terms used when describing the newcomers – “flows”, “flood”. Gradually, the focus on asylum seekers and refugees was shifted towards labour migrants perceived as a serious threat to UK citizens.

The third part investigates economic migrants using both the supply and the demand perspective. Sarah Spencer stresses the *special treatment* applied to both the highly skilled and low skilled migrants entering the labour market on a complementary basis (covering the deficits). It has become clear that the UK's main objective is to maximize the economic benefits of the labour migrants (as important contributors to the budget, as persons who cover the structural deficits of workers in various sectors, and not as beneficiaries of the British Social Services). The right focus is the pull demand approach. The same selective approach is used for international students, the UK's interest being to gain and preserve one of the largest stocks of *beautiful minds* (the author reminds that most of the ones coming for study in the UK may become labour migrants in the near future).

The family migration is tackled in Chapter 4 in which the negative perception of this form of migration due to the ones abusing the British system for family reunification is highlighted. The policy making should address

people's need for reuniting with the loved ones as well as to create a genuine system for controlling various forms of abuse (mainly fake marriages). This form of migration asks for a clear setting of objectives, otherwise any efforts for a policy reform might become a failure.

The fifth section deals with irregular migration – the author prefers this term to illegal migration or illicit migration. The complexity of this form of migration goes beyond general perception: irregular migrants as victims of human trafficking or irregular migrants as the only ones responsible for their misfortune. Any policy approach should involve all the entities affected by irregular migration: origin, transit and receiving countries. Statistics reveal that only 1% of the total number of migrants in the UK held an irregular status in 2007, and therefore they can hardly be perceived as the biggest threat against economy or social system.

The last section of the book focuses on the controversial issue of integration and citizenship. In the author's opinion, the UK, like many other host countries lacks a genuine strategy for successful integration of the newcomers. Fostering the economic, political or civic contribution of the migrants should meet their own expectations of becoming part of the host society. Sarah Spencer argues that British migration should consider integration as the most important challenge to be addressed.

However, the book lacks the *EU's mobility discourse*, people movement being analysed in terms of inflows and outflows of migrants.

Finally, we express our appreciation towards the author of the book for the remarkable effort of gathering useful and updated insights on the migration phenomenon in the UK. Various stakeholders like policy makers, academics, as well as researchers should reflect on the book and appreciate the well balanced analysis it offers.