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Editorial: JEMS special issue Crisis and Migration

## **The Global Economic Crisis as a Critical Juncture? The Crisis's Impact on Migration Movements and Policies in Europe and the US**

By Christof Roos and Natascha Zaun<sup>1</sup>

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### **Introduction**

The current global economic crisis has resulted in the strongest recession in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries since the Great Depression in the early 1930s and the 1970s oil shocks. This special issue sets out to explore how the most recent economic crisis impacted immigration and immigration-related policy in the United States of America and in European countries that are part of the OECD. The crisis of the late 2000s was offset by the collapse of the subprime US housing market, destabilising the financial system and leading to a sovereign debt crisis. The shock was marked by a “sudden [...] deterioration of most, or all, key macroeconomic indicators” such as the gross domestic product (GDP) growth, the unemployment rate, the level of inflation, and the public debt (Starke et al. 2013, 5). The GDP in OECD countries shrank by 3.49% in 2009, whereas it previously had grown by around 2 to 3% annually. Additionally, the unemployment rate in the OECD rose from 5.9% of the total labour force in 2008 to more than 8% in 2009 and subsequent years. During that time, the youth unemployment rate in the European Union (EU), the number of unemployed 15 to 24 year olds, increased steeply from 15 to more than 20%. In countries that were heavily affected by the crisis such as Greece and Spain youth unemployment rose from 20 to over 50% between 2008 and 2012 (OECD 2016). This resulted in a decline in demand for labour force. Common wisdom holds that economic recessions and high

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unemployment have an impact on the decisions of migrants to move, as well as on governments to consider restrictions in immigration policy. Yet, empirical findings on the crisis-migration nexus are sometimes contradictory and while some find a clear causal link between the crisis and changes in migration patterns and policies, others refute its existence.

Comparing the economic crises in the 1930s, 1970s, and the 2010s in Australia, Canada, and the US, Hatton suggests that these had a direct impact on immigration. According to his ten per cent rule “every 100 jobs lost result in 10 fewer immigrants” (2014, 28). In Europe, studies found that immigration has decreased and countries that were countries of emigration prior to the crisis experienced a decline in emigration and a rise in numbers of migrants returning (Papademetriou et al. 2010, 13; Koehler et al. 2010, 3). Besides this impact on the movement of migrants, the crisis can also be assumed to have had an impact on immigration policies. According to Kuptsch (2012, 20–2), countries that had practiced an open door policy in the 2000s, such as the UK, Spain, or the Czech Republic, used the crisis for instigating restrictive changes. Yet, these changes are suggested to be only modest in scope (Papademetriou et al. 2010, 16). Others identify a clear trend in terms of restrictions that are crisis induced. Accordingly, the crisis could be identified as a factor pushing for reductions in admission quotas and general recruitment in EU countries that were hit hardest by the economic downturn: foremost Italy, Portugal, Spain, and the UK (Koehler et al. 2010 28–30; Pastore 2012, 146). At the supranational EU level no policy change in reaction to the economic crisis could be observed. Rather, the budget constraints of public administration impacted on some southern EU member states’ capacity in fully implementing EU border and asylum policy. But also beyond the southern EU member states crisis-related budget-constraints can restrain expenditures related to a countries’ asylum-seekers’ reception system and hence impact on the quality of reception conditions in individual states (Trauner 2016). Researching discourse, Lindley’s edited volume (2014) points to crisis effects in terms of a government practice that links immigration to insecurity. Hatton (2014) arrives at a completely different conclusion and hardly sees any policy change during the time that European states responded to the crisis. He explains this by public opinion being focused on fiscal policies rather than the labour market. In addition, he argues that restrictions in immigration policy can only be exercised within a narrow margin. For instance, in the EU, access of asylum seekers and family members of migrants is

guaranteed by EU law. These are hence non-discretionary forms of migration on which states are not free to regulate in case they want to reduce immigrant admission (Roos and Zaun 2014).

Given these contradictive findings already concluded in 2009 and 2010, this special issue reflects on a broader time frame and data analysed in 2014 in the aftermath of the crisis. The contributions aim for a more up-to-date and in depth analysis of the crisis's actual impact on immigration movements and policies in the USA and Europe. When asking *What is the impact of the crisis on migration movements and policies in Europe and the US?*, we also ask *What is the scope of change?* and *Did the crisis motivate this change or did other factors do so?* Thus, we intend to avoid spurious conclusions that find a coincidence between changes in policies and the crisis where the causal link is missing. In investigating these questions we cover a range of different topics and countries affected differently by the crisis. Within Europe, we specifically aim at investigating countries representing different geographical zones and economic traditions. In this regard we cover established economies such as Germany and the UK as well as 'emerging' economies in Eastern Europe. This allows for a multifaceted picture and an account of the complexity of the crisis and its effects. As to migratory movements, topics are investigated that include the crisis's impact on naturalisation of citizens from other EU Member States across the EU (Graeber), cross-border commuting in Central Europe (Wiesböck et al.), and the post-crisis migratory strategies of Polish migrant workers (Janicka and Kaczmarczyk). Concerning the crisis's impact on immigration policies, the special issue includes studies on its impact on immigration politics in the US (Zaun, Roos and Gülzau), immigration and integration policies in Belgium (Gsir, Lafleur and Stanek), highly skilled policies across the EU (Cerna), and labour migration admissions more generally in the UK and Germany (Paul).

In investigating how the crisis affects migratory flows and immigration policies we contribute to the debate on what determines both migration and state responses to migration, placing a particular focus on the role of external shocks as the possible roots of critical junctures for policy change.

We find that the crisis had immediate effects on migration patterns. Migrants left crisis stricken countries (Wiesböck et al.), naturalised in non-crisis countries

where they had previously settled (Graeber), or stopped migrating to formerly attractive countries which were now negatively affected by the crisis (Janicka and Kaczmarczyk). Moreover, the crisis affected the type of migrants one can observe. Whereas prior to the crisis, highly-skilled migrants represented the majority of migrants, during the crisis there has been a particular shift to vulnerable groups such as low-skilled workers and women (Janicka and Kaczmarczyk; Wiesböck et al.).

Moreover, we find that indeed migration policies have changed in times of crisis. Yet, these changes are neither exclusively restrictions nor liberalisations, but encompass changes in both directions. Despite the coincidence of many policy changes with the crisis, these changes are *not primarily* induced by the crisis. Instead they were based on policy programmes and ideas that were initiated long before the crisis even began. This temporal discrepancy provides evidence that the crisis *did not cause* the changes (cf. Paul; Zaun, Roos, Gülzau), but that these changes were due to long-term processes. While the crisis was not the root-cause of policy changes, it served as an *ex post* justification for these changes (Czerna; Gsir, Lafleur, Stanek; Paul; Zaun, Roos, Gülzau). Similar to after the oil shocks in the 1970s, politicians rhetorically used the crisis to promote both liberal and restrictive policy-changes which they had planned before the crisis.

In the following sections we will present our findings on both migration patterns and immigration policies in depth and demonstrate in how far these address existing gaps in the literature on the migration-crisis nexus.

### **The Crisis's Impact on Movements: Insights from the Literature on Push and Pull Factors**

Scholars have suggested that migratory movements are influenced by so-called 'push and pull factors' (e.g. Ravenstein 1889; Lee 1966; Castles and Miller 1993). This literature asks what motivates people to undertake the risk of migration and provides an explanation based on classical economic rational actor models. *Push factors* are factors "impelling people to leave the areas of origin" and imply "demographic growth, low living standards, lack of economic opportunities and political repression" (Castles and Miller 1993, 19). Yet, migrants are usually not the poorest among the poor and, in fact, economic development has been shown to increase migratory pressures (Stalker 1994; Martin 2001; Cornelius 2002). *Pull factors* "attract [...] them [the migrants] to certain receiving countries" and comprise a "demand for labo[u]r,

availability of land, good economic opportunities and political freedoms” (Castles and Miller 1993: 19). While this model is often criticised for neglecting structural factors (Massey et al. 1998) and being ahistorical (Castles and Miller 1993) with its sole focus on the rational decisions of the individual migrants, there is broad evidence that migrants are indeed motivated by economic differentials when making the decision to migrate (Cornelius and Rosenblum 2005, 100). Hanson and Spilimbergo (1999) for instance demonstrate that the wage gap between the US and Mexico is a reliable predictor of migratory flows from Mexico to the US.

The global economic crisis can hence be expected to have significantly changed the configuration of a variety of push and pull factors in both the sending and the receiving countries. More specifically, the economic crisis would affect economic opportunities and the demand for labour force at both ends. Of course, the economic situation in the country of origin might still be worse than the one of the destination country which would result in little change in migratory patterns. However, if a destination country is hit particularly hard by the crisis, this could entail fewer movements to this country and change migratory movements. . Given the increase in unemployment, demand for labour would decrease in crisis-stricken countries and hence an important pull factor for immigrants would disappear, motivating fewer immigrants to make the journey to reach the country in question (cf. McCormick 2012: 2). This dynamic applies specifically to sectors of the economy that offer low-status and temporary employment such as manufacturing, construction, hotel and restaurant businesses. In these sectors migrant workers are overrepresented (Galgóczi, et al. 2012, 6–7). Moreover, countries which have previously attracted many immigrants can even be expected to have become countries of emigration during the crisis, as former immigrants would leave these countries to return to their countries of origin. Overall, the crisis could likely have presented a turning point for migratory movements to Europe and the US. While labour migration should be directly affected by the crisis, forced immigration and family migration may be expected to be influenced to a lesser extent by the crisis. Forced migration is heavily influenced by push factors such as wars and human rights violations in the migrant’s country of origin. Family migration is based on migrants and migrant networks already being present in the destination country (cf. Waldinger 1997; Massey et al. 1998; Fussell and Massey 2004). Yet, if the path to labour migration was progressively closed in response to the crisis, migrants can also be expected to look for alternative entry

points and to choose other forms of migration, applying for asylum or family reunification. This is because states face substantial constraints posed by international law in the areas of forced and family migration. While states can still try to limit these rights, they have less discretion in these policy areas than in labour migration. In addition, states member to the EU are constrained in limiting the access of EU nationals to their labour markets. Free movement of labour in the EU has substitution effects on recruitment of third-country nationals. As a consequence EU member states focus restriction on labour migration from third-countries (Paul 2013, 125).

The special issue contributes to this discussion in two ways. Firstly, the authors in this issue confirm that the crisis had a direct impact on migratory movements (see Papademetriou et al. 2010, 13; Koehler et al. 2010, 3). Fewer migrants immigrate to or settle in countries hit hard by the crisis. Polish migrants for example, the most populous group of intra-European migrants since 2004 left their country of origin in fewer numbers during the crisis. At the same time, a wave of Poles returning to Poland could not be detected despite the favourable socio-economic development in Poland during the crisis (Janicka and Kaczmarczyk). Former migratory destinations that were not affected by the crisis maintain a steady level of immigration (Wiesböck et al.). Yet, as both the contributions of Janicka and Kaczmarczyk and Wiesböck et al. find for Central Europe, the composition of these migratory flows has changed. During the crisis they observe that particularly vulnerable groups affected by the crisis, such as women and the unskilled, migrate most specifically to the non-affected countries in their neighbourhood or the EU more broadly. Secondly, the contributions focusing on migration among EU member states show how the crisis and the structural conditions of free movement policy in the EU interact. As Graeber finds intra-EU migrants, particularly those from crisis stricken countries, have often settled and naturalised in their destination country subsequent to the crisis, instead of leaving it due to the increased insecurity and uncertainty it has engendered. In addition, long-term immigrants stayed in their new home countries, while short-term immigrants returned when a demand in labour decreased as Janicka and Kaczmarczyk demonstrate for the case of Polish migrants. Thus, the initial rationale for free movement in the EU, that is, a labour supply that would flexibly adjust to changing economic conditions, at least partially finds some empirical confirmation.

### **The Crisis's Impact on Policies: The Crisis as a Critical Juncture?**

Following historical institutionalism, policy-making is bound by institutional path dependence. Past decisions constrain and enable policy developments to a point where change becomes difficult or even impossible. The respective political system and its openness for veto players such as political parties or institutions (e.g. Parliament, President) can inhibit the scope of possible change further. This explains why policies remain stable rather than change radically (Hall and Taylor 1996: 938; Pierson 1996: 145; Tsebelis, 2002). According to historical institutionalism, policies usually do not change, unless there is a 'critical juncture'. This is a moment of crisis or exogenous shock that weakens the path-dependent policy trajectory as well as participating actors' veto positions (Collier and Collier 1991).

Historically, the 1970s oil crisis is a prominent frame of reference for the hypothesis that external economic shocks can induce policy change. Following a steep increase in oil prices, Northwestern European economies experienced a severe crisis leading to high unemployment. Almost simultaneously, in 1973-74, Western European states such as Belgium, France, Germany, and the Netherlands that had relied heavily on foreign labour fundamentally changed their recruitment policy. The post-war pattern of guest worker systems offering a flexible supply of labour for the economy came to a definite end in 1974 (Castles 1986, 771). Since then, the oil crisis has been referred to as the reason for policy change in labour migration policy. For Germany and France, however, it was shown that the government had planned to end recruitment before the crisis could take effect. Politically and economically, many had already doubted for some time whether guest worker schemes would be an effective labour market policy. More and more foreign workers had reunited with their families which increased the social costs of the recruitment scheme (Herbert and Hunn 2000, 308; Weil 2005). Thus, the crisis had reinforced the already existing intention to reform the recruitment of foreign labour. The crisis presented an ideal justification and a window of opportunity for this fundamental policy change. Admission policies for labour migration were suspended, at least temporarily. For movements, the effects of this policy change were equally drastic. Former guest workers finally settled and multi-ethnic societies would emerge in Northwestern Europe (Castles 1986, 775). Considering these changes, it is fair to assert that the oil crisis fundamentally



impacted most European countries, albeit it could not entirely explain policy change in countries such as Germany and France. Whether a crisis is co-occurring or the reason for policy change that would have happened in its absence needs empirical testing (Pastore 2012, 142). The historical background of the 1970s crisis informs our assumption that the 2008-2012 economic crisis could also have offered a window of opportunity for actors looking for policy change.

The current literature on the latest economic crisis and its impact on migration policy is cautious in attributing effects similar to that in the aftermath of the 1970s crisis. With regard to policy, authors observed moderate rather than fundamental change (Papademetriou et al. 2010; Kuptsch 2012; Koehler et al. 2010). Different from the 1970s, the opening and closure of various immigration channels could concur and therefore only mitigate a trend towards restriction (Pastore 2012). Authors agree that policy responses to the crisis vary across countries and concentrate on forms of labour migration as a discretionary channel for admission (Green and Winters 2010, 1066; Pastore 2012, 142–143).

The contributions in this volume share the view that in most cases policy change can be observed to some extent during times of crisis. Yet, this does not imply that the crisis caused policy change. Defining the recent crisis as a critical juncture for policy would hence go too far. Neither have immigration policies in OECD countries changed dramatically nor can the crisis be singled out as the main driver for policy change.

Public policy theory defines the conditions for policy change as a change in government, national mood, or the occurrence of an urgent and pressing problem. The crisis is an opportunity that allows for advocates of policy change to attach their solutions to it (Kingdon 1995, 168–170). For policy change to happen, actors must be prepared to use pertinent opportunity structures. Additionally, they have to share the perception that the time for policy change has come (Kingdon 1995, 170–172). How a solution to a problem becomes the dominant alternative is related to the institutional resources of the actor proposing the policy. The absence of fundamental policy change during the crisis can thus be expected to be the result of actors having embarked on a policy path which they still consider to be valuable in times of crisis. Only in the few instances that actors reassess their policy ideas does change occur. Most of the changes we observe during the crisis, however, are based on pre-crisis

decisions. Little is known about the conditions that link the current crisis and immigration policy. Therefore, the next section examines how actors such as political parties of the left and right, as well as unions and employers have an interest in using the crisis as a window for policy change.

Actors with vested interests in immigration policy are interest groups. The lens of partisan conflicts traditionally helps explain liberal or restrictive change in immigration policy. Respective actors influence on, or presence in, government is an important factor in predicting the immigration policy orientation of a country. Political parties usually position on a left-right scale regarding immigration issues with the left promoting human rights and social protectionist ideas (Helbling 2013, 26) and the right sharing nationalist as well as neo-liberal positions (Kitschelt 1995). Immigration is a divisive issue for both, the political left and right since claims for welfare protectionism or safeguarding national identity can lead to immigration restriction. Moderate parties from the centre-left and centre-right are not likely to take a strong position against immigration. Freeman associates an “anti-populist norm” with social democrats, liberal conservatives, and Christian democrats (1995, 885). In fact, following an argument made by Starke (2013, 7) on crisis effects on the welfare state, one can also assume that the crisis would put aside partisan differences because a concern for the common good would substitute for partisan ideology.

In line with the general immigration and partisan politics literature, authors in this volume confirm party influence on policy change. For Belgium, Gsir, Lafleur, and Stanek show that a centre-right party put under pressure by a nationalist party in opposition pushed for restrictive change in immigration and integration policy. In this regard, the crisis served the parties’ rhetoric as a facilitator in justifying policy change. Also, the US case allows for insights into partisan conflicts during the crisis. Zaun, Roos, and Gülzau show how the crisis further aggravated parties’ and other interest groups’ conflicting positions on a comprehensive immigration reform. However, actors managed to promote policy change in alternative venues. Actors used the crisis as an additional justification for restrictive or expansive suggestions for reform they had already planned. For example, legalisation of the undocumented could be realised at the presidential level and the enforcement angle could be strengthened in certain states that, by majority, are governed by Republicans. For the UK, Paul shows that the co-occurrence of government change and the perception of a

migration control crisis explain the shift to induce radical restrictions. Public opinion against free mobility in the EU and liberal immigration policy enabled the newly elected conservatives to execute restrictions that were widely supported by the political mainstream at the time. Overall these findings detail how political parties influenced change. The crisis, however, is only one of many variables that intensified the need for some parties to push for change. Where parties felt no pressures for change, e.g. because of a more favourable economic situation, policies remained stable. Policy paths that they had embarked on before the crisis were pursued further as the cases of Germany and Belgium (Paul; Gsir, Lafleur, Stanek) demonstrate.

An economic crisis also provides an opportunity for social partners to lobby the public and political parties on their behalf. In times of crisis, migrant workers are vulnerable to exploitation if employers try to maintain profit margins in spite of decreasing economic activity (Galgóczy, et al. 2012, 6–7). Labour unions have been found to put particular emphasis on migrant workers' equal rights (Freeman 1995, 885–888), they have criticised that labour migration could provoke a race-to the bottom in workers' rights and wage dumping. By organizing and pushing for equal treatment and fair wages, unions can help avoid tensions with local workers (Heyes and Hyland 2012, 229). Along these lines, Cerna finds unions in the UK and Ireland to successfully lobby for restricting admission in order to avoid further pressure on the labour market. She argues that the cutback in recruitment of foreign workers by restricting the issuance of work permits is based on these lobbying efforts of unions which were due to the crisis. At the same time, the crisis not only opens a policy window for unions and their call for the enforcement of labour standards or restrictions in recruitment, but also for business to call for more liberalisation of labour markets. They can claim more flexibility with regard to wages and job security (Heyes and Hyland 2012). With regard to Sweden, Cerna confirms this assumption. As a result of earlier lobbying efforts, employers and the inauguration of a new centre-right and liberal government allowed the adoption of a completely demand-based labour migration system. Arguments for flexibility of labour were strong even during times of crisis. A similar long-term effect of lobbying efforts of employers and unions for policy liberalisation could be observed to take hold in Germany just as the crisis took effect in 2009. The good weathering of the crisis convinced the conservative-led government to push through previously planned liberalisation (Paul).

Policy change can be assessed in all cases, however, in most cases policy change was traced back to decisions and actor preferences that were taken before the crisis.

The contributions in this volume show that the crisis could reinforce preferences of social partners or political parties. The crisis has pronounced actor preferences on both liberal and restrictive policies and emphasised the deficiencies of the national migration systems at the time. In fact, actors need to seize the window of opportunity which the crisis presents and frame it as a ground for policy change in order for actual change to happen (Kingdon 1995, 172–173). Yet, they will only be successful if the institutional setting allows them to do so. In the majority of countries investigated, the institutional setting as well as policies are characterised by path dependency. While partial policy change coincides with the crisis, our contributors find that change is mainly based on institutional dynamics, discourses, and actor preferences that were present before the crisis.

## **Conclusion**

The question whether the most recent economic crisis should be considered a critical juncture for migration movements and migration policy in Europe and the USA cannot be definitively answered by the contributions to this volume. With regard to movements, the crisis indeed had direct effects, but by no means did it lead to similarly fundamental changes in movement patterns as the 1970s crisis when labour recruitment schemes were suspended. In terms of immigration policy, the authors examined the scope of change and the question of whether the crisis can be considered as the reason for change. Indeed, most of the case countries have changed certain elements of their immigration policies, mostly related to the recruitment of labour. However, these changes have often been prepared and envisaged by policymakers for some time pre-dating the crisis. Thus, we could observe that the crisis was a reinforcing factor pushing for change. Similar findings have been made in comparative welfare state research. Starke et al. find, conditioned by the size of the welfare state, both retrenchment and expansion during crisis. At the same time, the scope of welfare policy change is described as incremental rather than fundamental and policy response to external shocks as an exception rather than the norm (Starke et al. 2013, 182). By providing rigorous analysis on a so far under-researched topic, this special issue empirically clarified the actual scope of policy change as well as changes

in movements. Methodologically, the variety of contributions in this special issue assess the crisis from different angles applying qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The qualitative contributions trace crisis effects on actors and show how institutional constraints open or close opportunities for policy change. The quantitative contributions enhance the external validity of the findings and shed light on interesting links between the crisis and movement as well as policies.

Theoretically, the special issue speaks to the debate on critical junctures (Collier and Collier 1991, Pierson 1996, Capoccia 2015) and opportunities for policy change. We provide further evidence for findings suggesting that the impact of external shocks should not be overrated, as they only translate into policy change when there are actors that actually use these crisis events to foster change. Hence external shocks do not induce a critical juncture *per se*. As such, one cannot look to external shocks as a predictor for policy change (Capoccia 2015). Partisan politics and who is in government at a specific time seem to moderate crisis effects. Overall, policy change is rather induced by new actors coming into power, or by existing actors gaining a more favourable opportunity structure to pursue their preferences when crises hit, than by an external shock. We therefore propose the study of partisan politics against the background of an institutional framework as crucial to the understanding of policy change in immigration policies. Overall, immigration policies are much more stable over time given institutional path dependencies and the stickiness of the political process in which today's policy programmes are the result of political processes that often pre-dated the crisis. However, we clearly see that the political rhetoric does change in relation to crisis and that policymakers can use the crisis as a window of opportunity to push through change that they have already endorsed for reasons that have nothing to do with the crisis itself.

Whereas an external shock's impact on policy is limited, it does have a more direct effect on the phenomenon of migratory movements itself. While the crisis has not entailed a complete reconfiguration of migratory movements to the extent the oil shocks in the 1970s did, it did have some immediate effects on these movements. As this special issue shows, a change of the macro-economic situation of some countries directly affects the migration choices of individuals in both crisis stricken and unaffected countries. The reason is that migrants can make their decisions rather independently and individually, whereas policy change relies on an institutionalised decision-making process which tends to be cumbersome. Thus states do not

automatically respond to a rise in unemployment with restriction in immigration policies. And, during the latest economic crisis the two processes of change in migration policies and migration patterns seem to be rather unconnected. This finding applies especially to movements internal to the EU. They could not be restricted by policy change at the national level.

Given these findings it would be interesting to investigate other external shocks that are expected to impact migration policies in receiving countries such as the Arab Spring or the current European 'refugee crisis' to see whether these do or do not have immediate effects.

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