

**KEYNOTES ON MIGRATION GIVEN AT THE
VITH REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE EUROPEAN
RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES,
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**The challenges of migration for the
Red Cross and Red Crescent movement
– Introduction to the main theme**

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In the industrial countries the average birth rate is 1.2 children per woman, while 2.1 children would be needed to keep the balance of population. In 2001 the birth rate in the EU was about 0.5% less than in 2000 (4.03 millions), in the mid sixties the number of births still had been about 2 millions higher.¹ Even with a moderately increased immigration the population continues to decrease. The decrease of the economically active population is paralleled by an increase of retirees. This development constitutes a danger to the inter-generation contract as the basis of our society and a threat to our social welfare and solidarity in spite of the actual high percentage of unemployment.² At the present rate of decline in births and the growth of ageing of the population, Western Europe is expected to need some 160 million foreign workers over the next 25 years to compensate for labour shortages, if the current standard of living shall be maintained.

Last year, the independent Commission on Immigration of the German government issued a report, called “Süssmuth Report”, which starts with the lines: “Germany needs immigrants. We need immigrants, because the population of Germany ages.” And it continues:

¹ Eurostat: Erste Bevölkerungsschätzungen für 2001, 12.12.01. (www.europa.eu/int/comm/eurostat)

² Karl-Heinz Meier-Braun, Einwanderung als demographischer Glücksfall? Studien zur Bevölkerungsentwicklung zeigen: Europa braucht Einwanderer, in: Ausländer in Deutschland, www.isoplan.de/aid/index.htm.

Germany has become an immigration country. The same is true for other European countries, there are drastic changes in the population structure going on, transforming the fundamentals of our societies.³

The growth of population ageing is not limited to the Western countries, but a global phenomenon. This fact has been verified through a number of studies. The “2000 Revision” of the “World Population Prospects” of the United Nations⁴ states that

Population ageing is unprecedented, without parallel in the history of humanity. ... By 2050, the number of older persons in the world will exceed the number of young for the first time in history. Moreover, by 1998 this historic reversal in relative proportions of young and old had already taken place in the more developed regions. Population ageing is profound, having major consequences and implications for all facets of human life. In the economic area, population ageing will have an impact on economic growth, savings, investment and consumption, labour markets, pensions, taxation and intergenerational transfers. In the social sphere, population ageing affects health and health care, family composition and living arrangements, housing and migration. In the political arena, population ageing can influence voting patterns and representation...” And the report goes on to say, that “As the twenty-first century began, the world population included approximately 600 million older people, triple the number recorded fifty years earlier. By midcentury, there will be some 2 billions older persons – once again, a tripling of this age group in a span of 50 years. ... In the more developed regions, almost one fifth of the population was aged 60 or older in the year 2000; by 2050, this proportion is expected to reach one third.

Worldwide 150 million people are in search of better living conditions, 22 million of them being refugees in the classical sense.⁵ In Europe there are at the moment 5.5 million refugees, according to UNHCR. Today we are not primarily talking about refugees, but about migration. Migration is mainly an economically motivated phenomenon, though very often without a legal basis. The net influx of international migrants into the European Union in 2001 was about one million persons legally immigrating. To this there have to be added between 300,000 and 500,000 people who, according to the IOM, the International Organisation for Migration, enter clandestine, inspite of the existing legal restrictions.

The decline in the birth rate in the North – the “baby bust”, the contrary of the “baby boom” – and the great labour supply in the South automatically lead to migratory movements. The economic and demographic disequilib-

³ Zuwanderung gestalten – Integration fördern. Bericht der Unabhängigen Kommission „Zuwanderung“, ed. by Rita Süßmuth, Berlin 2001.

⁴ World Population Prospects. The 2000 Revision. Highlights and Executive Summary, ed. by the Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, New York 2001, p. xxviii.

⁵ Jean-Daniel Gerber, Migration needs a legal basis, in: Der Bund, 15.06.2001, p. 18.

rium between the West and the East as well as between the North and the South is continuously increasing, therefore the migratory pressure will increase in the next years accordingly. And people will come, as migrants or as refugees. On March 21, Italy declared a state of emergency for the whole of the country because of a number of refugee boats arriving from the Middle East. The migration question cannot be solved by any nation on its own, nor can it be solved by public authorities alone. A close cooperation between international organizations like the ILO, the IOM and the OSCE and national authorities as well as NGOs is needed. And therefore the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement needs partners from all these organizations to be strong enough to achieve its goals in the field of migration.

When we are talking about migration today, we are dealing with a multifaceted, controversial and often emotional topic. Working migration as well as flight and expulsion have created a new ethnic and religious heterogeneity in Europe, particularly in the big cities. The integration of the immigrants causes great challenges not only for themselves, but also for the host societies: Immigrants are more intensely confronted with unemployment than the home population. They often live separated from the majority population in ethnic quarters. And even though they make a large contribution to the social welfare of the receiving society and pay much more taxes and social insurance contributions than they draw, the great majority of immigrants feel themselves as foreigners, even years after their arrival, and even those who have made a social and economic career. On the other side, parts of the resident population feel threatened by "foreign infiltration" and try hard to heighten the barriers against the "immigration wave". People are concerned that substantial migration would change the cultural and linguistic norms. There is a fear that migrants take over jobs and impose an unacceptable burden on social welfare, health and education systems. On this breeding-ground discrimination, xenophobia, and racist attitudes directed towards migrants are thriving.

The European Union has largely abolished the borders between its Member States, but the frontiers towards non-member states, particularly the poorer ones, have become more tight than ever before. Up to now there is no common immigration policy of the European Governments, though close cooperation in this field continues. In general, immigration permits are granted only to highly qualified specialists demanded by the national economies. Other possibilities of access are denied or at least closely restricted. However, this policy of recruiting well-educated people from economically deprived countries contributes to deepen the social and economic problems in the source countries and to aggravate the living conditions for the poorer parts of the population. The widening gap between poor

and rich – especially between the North and the South – is one of the main factors causing migration flows.

Whilst the receiving countries are implementing restrictive immigration and border control legislation to close the migration door, a growing number of people seek other ways of entrance, often as asylum seekers. The difficulties of access have created a multi-billion criminal industry of human trafficking. Traffickers are unscrupulously exploiting an already vulnerable group and force people into life-long debts, slave labour, prostitution etc. There is no official protection for illegally travelling migrants who are dependent on traffickers sometimes “controlling” their “clients” by separating family members during their journey. The tracing services of our movement are increasingly confronted with these consequences of migration, and the National Societies have to acknowledge the importance of this tracing work as well as the lobbying to the relevant authorities and institutions.

The changes in the admission policy of the receiving states during the last years have caused an increase in the number of migrants in irregular situations, the “sans-papiers” as they are called in Switzerland. Though their exact number is not known, it must be assumed that a considerable part of this group pursues an illegal occupation. Their employers profit from the undocumented labour, they can pay low wages without taxes, social insurance or health insurance contributions. The sans-papiers cannot resist such exploitation: Even if they have at least some rights – depending on the country of stay – it is difficult to assert themselves, for fear of being expelled.

The living and working conditions of migrants, especially of refugees, asylum seekers and people in irregular situations are mostly linked to poverty and exclusion. These people are often working in badly paid jobs or are affected by unemployment. Though not necessarily, but potentially the foreign-born population has to be considered as a vulnerable group whose precarious situation may and in many cases indeed does generate health problems. In particular women, children and minors form a high-risk group whose special problems have to be taken into account. Most of the recent Non-EU immigrants and refugees living in Europe come from regions with serious problems of violence and conflicts, diseases prevalence and lack of proper health services. The health situation often worsens due to the migratory and post-migratory adjustments. Add to this the psychosocial load of problems arising in the family systems, not to forget the special situation of the traumatized victims of torture.

Migrants and refugees in Europe are facing common problems concerning health services and care provisions (particularly irregular migrants and refugees in the process of legalising their situation), although the different European countries are dealing with these problems in different ways. The right to

health is a universal right, but it cannot be secured if access to health care services is restricted or even prohibited. However, not only the legal regulations hinder access, there are also language problems and a lack of information about the public health system in the migrant community as well as socio-cultural differences in the context of understanding and treatment of diseases. All these factors contribute to aggravating the often precarious health situation of migrants. Good health, however, is a prerequisite for successful social integration.

Migrants are people with human rights, no matter what their legal or illegal status is. Many of them are belonging to the group of the most vulnerable, and our National Societies have to take care of them, irrespective of their nationality, race, religion, political opinion etc. We have to take sides with their concerns and needs and to do advocacy work for them, just as National Societies also care for the wounded of the enemy in case of war.

The humanitarian work of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is guided by the Fundamental Principles of the Movement and central values such as the protection of life, health and human dignity. These aims have been re-emphasised in the Strategy 2010⁶ of 1999, where it is stated that the Mission of the International Federation is “to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity”. Thus the rapidly increasing vulnerability of migrants and the problems of migration are a priority issue of the Movement, which calls for concentrated and coordinated action of its different parts and organs.

Today’s topic of “Migration” is not new on the agenda of international Red Cross and Red Crescent conferences. The General Assembly of 1995 already declared that “The migratory phenomena present a challenge to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement which must be faced in the spirit of its Principles”. In 1997 PERCO, the Platform for European Red Cross Cooperation on Refugees, Asylum-seekers and Migrants, has been established to promote good practice and the exchange of experience, to discuss common concerns and to carry out relevant joint activities. Today 10 out of 15 European Union National Societies are represented, plus the Swiss Red Cross. Assistance for migrants also was one of the main themes of the Eighth Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the Mediterranean countries Mai 2000 in Nice where the major causes of migrations in this area were examined and important recommendations and resolutions for increased cooperation between the National Societies were adopted.⁷ Furthermore the Council of Delegates 2001 of the RC-RC Movement emphasized in the

⁶ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Strategy 2010, Geneva 1999.

⁷ Croix-Rouge Française, Rapport sur la 8^{ème} Conférence des Sociétés de la Croix Rouge et du Croissant Rouge de la Méditerranée, Nice 11.–13.mai 2000.

“Resolution 4” its deep concern about the need to improve protection and assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons.⁸

The present conference stands in the tradition of the Copenhagen Conference of 1997 where the main focus was on the furtherance of cooperation and capacity-building of National Societies as well as on the coordination of actions to improve the situation of the most vulnerables. Today’s main theme of Migration continues this direction by addressing the increasing causes and consequences of migration and the needs of assistance. The target is to define the advocacy role of the National Societies with regard to uprooted people – irrespective of their legal status – and to develop sustainable concepts and strategies in order to align our services to the decrease of the suffering of migrants in need.

The theme of migration will continue to figure on the agenda of the Movement. In its information bulletin of March 2002 the Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent presents recommendations for an International Conference in 2003 on the general theme of “Human Dignity”, and migration is named as one of the main themes.⁹ However, it seems to me that the Movement – like most large organizations – requires quite some time to adjust its plans and policies to the concrete problems of migrants – in spite of these conferences and resolutions. And sometimes I think that the problem is bigger than it has been realised by our National Societies. I have asked myself if we can react quickly enough to the needs of the migrant vulnerability. It is my earnest hope that today’s conference will lead to tangible results in terms of intensified efforts to stop the disruptive social influences of migration. We need to become concrete and binding in our decisions, focusing on a few realizable actions on which the National Societies agree.

To sum up, I would like to emphasize once more that migration is a global phenomenon of increasing importance. It is paralleled by growing social and economic disparities on a global scale and substantial changes in the demographic structures of our national societies. To face the rapidly increasing vulnerability of migrants the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has to centre its strategies and activities on these challenges – also in terms of budgeting. In the Swiss Red Cross for example the budget of the migration department now takes 15 per cent of the overall budget of the National Office.

Let me add one last thought: When we are talking about migration we should not forget the role which an active participation of migrants can play in the different areas of our movement, either as volunteers or as professionals. Their know-how and their experiences constitute an important social

⁸ Council of Delegates 2001, Resolution 4: Movement Action in favour of refugees and internally displaced persons.

⁹ Commission Permanente de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge, Bulletin d’information N° 13/8, Mars 2002.

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and human capital. In the Swiss Red Cross we have migrants and refugees working as professionals in various areas of our organization – at our migration department they provide about 40 per cent of the staff. Migrants often show a great sensitivity towards integration and discrimination issues, and they know the problems of their clients and of the migrant community by their own experiences.