

We Need Workers and You Need Jobs, What Can Go Wrong?

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Abstract. The search for a better life seems to be one of the earliest and most elementary desires of human beings. Those who have been looking to improve their living conditions frequently move from one place to another, which in many cases requires crossing state borders. However, if the foreign workers can meet the labor demand in the host country, market equilibrium is reached and in purely economic terms the problem is solved. In practice, the situation can be much more complicated, especially if the cultural distance between the host culture and the worldviews of the immigrants are significant. Our paper is a case study of one specific group of migrants that came to the United Kingdom: the Pakistanis that migrated to the UK in the late 1950s and early 1960s. We discuss some of the problems in their acculturation and assimilation. We also make some recommendations for avoiding such scenarios in the future and replace the older practices with “smart” immigration policy. Our paper is also a call to the policymakers to revisit the past and existing immigration and labor policies.

Keywords: *immigration, Pakistanis, Mirpur, socialization, the United Kingdom, economic policy*

Introduction

During human history, mankind has witnessed tens of millions of people raise themselves from poverty to prosperity through migration. The sequential waves of immigration of Eastern Europeans to the United States of America, the settlement of the Sikhs in Canada, and the movement of workers from Mexico to the U.S. are but a few examples of voluntary migration.

The act of migration is a bold and daring step for the ones that leave their homelands in hopes for greater opportunities. While the act requires entrepreneurial risk-taking on the part of the migrants, it also requires employment opportunities and a humanitarian stance in the host countries. Hence, there are costs and benefits for the migrant as well as the host cultures. In hopes of opportunity, employment, and prosperity, the migrants uproot themselves and venture into a new culture frequently having little knowledge of what may await

them. Some of the surprises can be unpleasant. The changes required in adjusting to a new culture can be taxing and difficult to bear.

The host cultures gain the much-needed workforce that adds to the prosperity of the host nation. However, if the new arrivals seem unwilling to assimilate, adopt the values and lifestyle of the host country, may be perceived as problematic misfits. The disinclination to acculturate may stem from several reasons. Traditions, religious beliefs, and cultural distance are a few of the impeding variables. People with similarities in belief systems, languages, and social norms may assimilate more easily into a new culture than people with differences in their traditions, and values. It may be relatively easier for a German or a British individual to assimilate in Sweden. There are many cultural similarities between Germany, and Sweden, or between Sweden and England. The cultural distance is greater between Sweden and Greece. It's perhaps more pronounced between Sweden and Romania, or Sweden and Ukraine.

Our paper is a case study of one specific group of migrants that came to England from a distant culture, i.e. the Pakistanis who arrived in the UK around 1960. We describe their experiences and difficulties in assimilation into British culture and point to some parallel experiences in other European countries such as France, Germany, and Sweden, where immigrants' assimilation has been problematic.

The Mirpuris in the UK

Today, when one speaks of the nearly one million Pakistanis in the UK, one is really talking about the Mirpuris that account for approximately 60-70% of the British-Pakistani population.¹ These unskilled workers come to England during the 1960s and their families and dependents in the subsequent decades. The main concern for the first-generation of workers from Mirpur was to work, save money, and either send it back home or bring their families over.^{2,3} Six decades later, this group has been unsuccessful in assimilating into British culture. Their families, their

¹ Samira Shackle, "The mosques aren't working in Bradford: Bradford's Pakistani community predominantly originates from the Mirpur region." *New Statesman*, (August 20, 2010). <http://www.newstatesman.com/society/2010/08/bradford-british-pakistan>.

² Muhammad Anwar, *Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain* (London: Heinemann, 1979).

³ Marta Bolognani "The Myth of Return: Dismissal, Survival or Revival? A Bradford Example of Transnationalism as a Political Instrument." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (January 2007): 59-76.

children, and the subsequent third generation have remained marginalized and outside of the mainstream culture. The situation has been similar for the Turks in Germany, and the Algerians and Moroccans in France. The workers from Greece, Italy, Poland and Yugoslavia that came to Sweden to work have also been less successful in assimilating into the Swedish culture than the workers that came from Germany and the Nordic countries.

The background

Mirpur is a district in the north-central part of Pakistan. The river Jhelum flows through it. In 1960, Pakistan decided to construct a dam on the river to irrigate 30 million acres of land and produce 1000 MW of electricity. Building the dam meant submerging 280 villages and displacing 110,000 people.⁴ Mangla Dam was to be the seventh largest dam in the world. Binnie & Partners of London designed and supervised the undertaking; Sir Geoffrey Binnie, a senior partner, led the team.⁵ It was a US\$1.473 billion project funded by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. In addition to the government of Pakistan and the UK, several other countries were involved. Belgium, Czechoslovakia, and Japan supplied the turbines and generators, and an Italian construction company was responsible for the construction. Austria, Canada, West Germany, New Zealand, and the USA also partnered in the project.

Mirpur was an economically depressed area with extremely low literacy rates. The Pakistani government offered passports to the displaced and the British government issued work visa if they chose to come to work in the UK. The British contractors provided the Mirpuris legal and financial assistance. During the 1960s and the 1970s, the UK needed workforce for its textile factories. The impoverished rural district of Mirpur had the cheap, unskilled labor. It was a match made in heaven.

Literally, tens of thousands of young men from the Mirpur District came to

4 Bogumil Terminski, "Development-Induced Displacement and Resettlement: Theoretical Frameworks and Current Challenges", Indiana University, 2013. Available at: <http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/dlc/handle/10535/8833>

5 Alan Wood, "Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society: Geoffrey Morse Binnie (13 November 1908 - 5 April 5,1989)". London: Royal Society. (1990): 45–57.

Britain.⁶ By 1966, there were more than 120,000 Pakistani's in the UK.⁷ Many of these men worked in the so-called "Black Country" factories in and around Bradford. According to the 2011 census, 20.4 percent of Bradford's population was Pakistani - the city has earned the name: "Bradistan".⁸

The reasons behind the assimilation's failure

The men that immigrated from Pakistan were mostly uneducated and unskilled. They could only speak the Punjabi dialect used in their region. Most of these men lacked any formal schooling and consequently were devoid of language acquisition skills. For most of them, to try to learn English was unattainable and somewhat unnecessary. Nor had they any experience in using or operating any kind of machinery. Without language or technical skills, what could these people do? How would these people adjust and acculturate in a country with different traditions, dietary habits, ways of dressing, and most importantly, religion?

The answer: They did not acculturate. They did not adapt to the ways of the host culture. They did not blend. These immigrants not only remained on the periphery of the host culture, they refused to accept the British mainstream culture and social mores.^{9 10 11} What happened to these people? They worked as brickmakers and bricklayers. They worked in textile mills carrying in the bundles of cotton and carrying out bolts of cloth. They worked as loaders and unloaders of produce, meat, and grain. Most of these were low-paying jobs requiring working long shifts, often six days a week. Such jobs were unacceptable to the local workers. Men from Mirpur took these jobs. These men lived in overcrowded houses populated with other men from Mirpur. It was common to find four beds in one room, with barely

⁶ Madeleine Bunting, (2005). "The history of Britain's Mirpur population may help explain why some became suicide bombers." *The Guardian*, July 18, 2005. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/jul/18/july7.religion>

⁷ Department for Communities and Local Government, "*The Pakistani Muslim Community in England. Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities*", London: Communities and Local Government. Eland House, 2009: 26.

⁸ Shackle.

⁹ Tariq Modood T. and Richard Berthoud, *Ethnic minorities in Britain: Diversity and disadvantage* (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997).

¹⁰ Bolognani.

¹¹ Raffay Rizwan and Antony Williams, "'Only the wind hears you...' The Experiences of Pakistani Girls in a Primary School: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis," *Educational & Child Psychology*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2015): 36-46.

enough space to walk between the beds. One person would awaken and go to work his shift; another one would return from his shift and use the recently vacated bed. Beds were doing shifts. To save money, these men often shared their work boots and overalls.

They prepared their own meals and hardly ever went out to eat. The British restaurants that served beef or chicken also served pork which was unacceptable to these men. Nor did these men make any effort to socialize with the locals. In their minds, the wine drinking and pork eating Christians were “unclean”. In their minds, women openly mixing and socializing with men were “contaminated”. The Mirpuris lived in England, but they lived outside British society. They never felt the need to learn the language or integrate into a culture that according to their religion was tainted and unacceptable. They were living in England, yet they rejected her people and culture.

However, these men, working indefatigably, saved money to send it back home to support their families and parents. Their villages, where people once used oil lamps, began to be electrified. The neglected areas began to see signs of development. Roads, sanitation systems, construction of new homes equipped with their own power generators and satellite dish antennas popped up everywhere. Due to the Mirpuri diaspora, the region witnessed great economic boost and became one of the most prosperous areas of Pakistan. A recent BBC report characterized the revived Mirpur as “Little England” in Pakistan.¹²

Over time, these workers brought their families to England. The first significant step in that direction was made by the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act. That regulation limited free influx of workers from the former British colonies, however, it made provisions for allowing the families to reunite. Further restrictions came into force in 1969 tightening the immigration. The new laws still allowed the relatives of the male workers already residing in the UK. Among the more than 80,000 Pakistanis who came to the UK between 1973 and 1981, almost all were family members of those already settled there.¹³ The more problematic aspect of the tide of Pakistani immigrants were the wives brought to England from Pakistan. These women stayed at home as homemakers.

Since the law required it, their children attended the local schools in the

¹² Aleem Maqbool, “How city of Mirpur became ‘Little England’”, BBC Magazines, 5 March 5, 2012. <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-17156238>

¹³ Shackle.

mornings. They spent their afternoons studying the Koran and Islamic studies at the local mosques. Just as the men made no attempt to socialize with the local people, their wives did not mix with the women of the neighborhoods. In most cases, the men forbid it, fearing the white women would plant the western ideas into the heads of their Pakistani women.¹⁴ Just as they had avoided socialization, they kept their wives and children outside the mainstream British society. In many instances, they did not permit their children to play with the local children.¹⁵ These immigrants, to a certain extent, created their little Mirpur in London, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Bradford, and other industrial cities in England.

Since nearly all the workers from Mirpur were uneducated, they paid little attention to the education of their children. Despite some recognition of the benefits stemming from better education on the labor market, they were anxious about the 'perceived corruptive influence of a largely secular society' and Westernization.^{16 17} Therefore, in many cases, they neither required it for their sons nor encouraged it for their daughters. As a result, the children of the Pakistani immigrants, unlike the children of the other Asians that generally excelled in schools, did poorly.¹⁹ Neither did these children acquire social or linguistic skills necessary to assimilate and participate in the local culture. Many of the children of these workers grew up with adjustment and identity issues. Since these children interacted mainly with children of Mirpuri parents, the only language they fully developed was the Punjabi dialect of the Mirpur region; the only place where they interacted with other children was at the mosques.

Mosques are segregated places of worship; men and women pray in different parts of the mosques. Boys and girls played, prayed, and studied in different sections of the mosque, or at different times of the day.²⁰ It was as if these children

¹⁴ Aisha Ijaz and Tahir Abbas, (2010). "The impact of inter-generational change on the attitudes of working-class South Asian Muslim parents on the education of their daughters." *Gender and Education*, Vol. 22, No. 3(May 2010): 313–326.

¹⁵ Rizwan and Williams.

¹⁶ Tehmina Basit, "'I want more freedom but not too much': British Muslim girls and dynamics of family values." *Gender and Education* Vol. 9 (1997): 425–39.

¹⁷ Fauzia Ahmed, "Modern tradition? British Muslim women and academic achievement." *Gender and Education*. Vol. 13 (2001): 137–52.

¹⁸ Ijaz and Abbas.

¹⁹ Department for Education and Skills, (2006).

²⁰ Rizwan and Williams .2015

were being raised not in England but in a remote village in Pakistan.

These immigrants arrived 60 years ago; the grocery stores and clothing shops serving these Pakistanis in Bradford have announcements and signs in Punjabi language, written in Urdu script. As of 2015, over 60 percent of the Pakistanis in Britain were born and raised in Britain. However, as their tradition and culture dictate, these men insist on marrying within their clans and tribes, often their first cousins raised in Pakistan.²¹ The British government has tried to contain the tide of immigration by passing laws requiring that the person sponsoring visas for his wife and children must have a certain level of income. Many of the Pakistani men in Britain are unable to meet such financial conditions. Previously, people could get married at the age of 16. The new laws require that both partners are 21 years old. Both restrictions, the Pakistanis argue, are threats to their traditional family structure and a violation of their tradition of marrying at a young age.

Paradoxically, restrictive migration laws by the UK government only strengthen such practices - getting married to a person already residing in the UK is the easiest way to legally immigrate to the UK. The cultural and economic factors work together according to a very simple pattern that can be boiled down to the statement: "if your son and my daughter marry, our families are further united, and the arrangement comes with a special wedding present, the ticket to migration".²² ²³ Many of these young brides arriving in Britain were uneducated. Upon arrival, these young women have and raise their children in a culture about which they know nothing. Ignorance and poverty prevail in the Pakistani community in the UK.

Challenges to the labor market

In times of economic prosperity, when there are jobs for almost everyone, it is easy to be generous and host both the guest workers and refugees. However, when an economy is in recession, the same guests become a liability. The collapse of

²¹ Alison Shaw, "The arranged transnational cousin marriages of British Pakistanis: critique, dissent and cultural continuity." *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (June 2006): 209–220.

²² Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, "Transnational lives, transnational marriages: a review of the evidence from migrant communities in Europe." *Global Networks*, Vol. 7, No. 3(2007): 271–288.

²³ Angela Dale, "Migration, marriage and employment amongst Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi residents in the UK", Working Paper 2008-02, Manchester: University of Manchester.

the manufacturing industries in the 1980s hit the unskilled Mirpuris the hardest and further deepened their dispossession and marginalization.²⁴ More than half of the working-age Pakistanis are, either not seeking work, or are unemployable. The reason: lack of English language and professional skills. Nearly 75 percent of the immigrants without adequate English language skills are holding menial jobs like farmhands, in the factory workers, or working in cleaning and janitorial position.²⁵ There have been no programs for the retraining of the unskilled foreign workforce.

The real beneficiaries of the Mangla Dam construction were the British and the European construction companies, and the industries that acquired cheap labor for their mills in the UK. The British government had no specific plans for the housing, healthcare, teaching of English language, or any social programs for the integration and acculturation of these workers or their families. The British government also failed to include the host communities such as Bradford, London, Manchester, Birmingham, and Leeds into the discussion of hosting, accommodating, and accepting the foreign workers. For most of these communities, the new visitors were a surprise at first and an unwelcome element when these men showed no interest in either learning the language or the British way of life. The areas where the Mirpuris moved in, the White people moved out. In 2016, the city of London elected Sadiq Khan as the mayor. Khan's parents came from Pakistan. His father was a bus driver and the mother, a seamstress in South London. Mr. Khan is an exception to the rule of the phenomenon of unskilled immigrants. For most of the Mirpuri workers and their families, the reality is still rather grim.

According to a report published in *The Economist* in 2009, only 25% of the Pakistani women in Britain were able to find work.²⁶ Thus, through marrying their cousins and bringing them over, the Mirpuri community has been importing poverty. The unemployment in the UK, at the time of this writing (December 2018) is at its lowest (4.0%) since 1975.²⁷ Nevertheless, the unemployment rates are much higher

²⁴ Shackle.

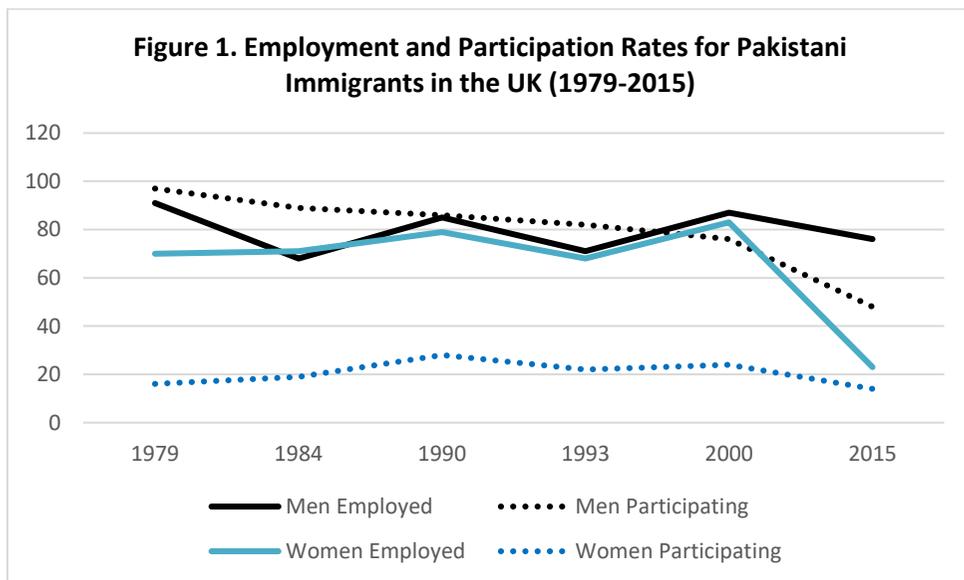
²⁵ John Bingham, J. (2014). "The 800,000 people living in Britain with little or no English", *The Telegraph*, January 29, 2014. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/10605581/The-800000-people-living-in-Britain-with-little-or-no-English.html>

²⁶ *The Economist*, "Pakistan and Britain: The immigration superhighway", April 16, 2009. <http://www.economist.com/node/13497357>

²⁷ Larry Elliot and Julia Kollewe, "Pay Growth Slows to Weakest in a Year Despite fall in Joblessness", *The Guardian*, August 14, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/aug/14/uk-unemployment-falls-pay-growth-jobless-rate>

(10%) for the foreign-born workers than the UK-born workforce. Hourly wages for the workers from Pakistan and Bangladesh are among the lowest.

The evaporation of the textile and manufacturing jobs in the 1980s is reflected in the drop of Pakistani men and women in the workforce. The second recession of the early 1990s rendered a similar incline in employment for this segment. According to the 2015 Ethnicity Facts and Figures Report by the UK government, the overall employment for Pakistani women has dropped from 71% in 1979 to 23% in 2015. During the same period, the participation rate for Pakistani men dipped from 97% in 1979 to 48% in 2015. Figure 1. presents the *employment* and *participation* data for the Pakistani community in the UK.



Source: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/>

This segment of the population is not only poverty-stricken but is also hostile towards the host culture. In April of 2009, the British police apprehended 12 men on suspicion of a terrorist plot. Ten of these were Pakistanis. The London bombing of 2005 that killed 56 people involved four men. Two of these were of Pakistani descent; the third was a Pakistani in Britain on a student visa; the fourth, a Jamaican-born who had converted to Islam while visiting Pakistan.²⁸ Many of the recent terrorist attacks on European cities have been the work of the offspring of Muslim

²⁸ Craig Whitlock and Kamran Khan, "3 London bombing suspects were in Pakistan this year." *Washington Post*, July 19, 2005.

immigrants from Pakistan, Iran, Syria, and Iraq.²⁹ According to one political economist, Pakistani Muslims tend to be more radical than Indian Muslims.³⁰

Hindsight suggests that the policymakers in the UK and other Western European countries that invited foreign workers (e.g. France and Germany) could have developed concrete plans for the socialization and integration of the new workforce. The local communities could have been included in the dialogue before bringing in the guest labors. Neither were the guest workers informed about the sociocultural differences and challenges that awaited them in the foreign lands.

The situation is somewhat similar in Belgium, Finland, France, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the Netherlands where the unemployment rates among the migrants are over 10 percentage points higher than for the domestic citizens. Furthermore, large portions of the non-EU workers are from Muslim countries. Research suggests that individuals with foreign and Muslim-sounding names have a much lower chance of getting shortlisted or hired.³¹

The policymakers and the politicians justify their past policies as humanitarian acts and as steps taken to protect human rights. The industries that hired the foreign workers in Sweden claim they offered equal wages and benefits to Swedish-born and foreign workers. However, the outcomes of these, so-called, “good intentions”, in many parts of Europe such as Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and the UK have resulted in segregation, disproportional unemployment, racial tensions, and homegrown terrorism.

Conclusion and Recommendations

What can go wrong when we need workers and you need work? Apparently, plenty. Legal migration in Europe has been a “recruitment failure”, i.e., wrong people are hired, or people are hired for the wrong reasons. Whenever people are hired without a careful job-and-need analysis, or people are hired that are inappropriately qualified, the consequences are costly and frustrating for the employers and the

²⁹ Runnymede Trust. *Islamophobia. A Challenge for Us All*. Report of the Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia. London: Runnymede Trust, 1997.

³⁰ Tomas Friedman, “Who are we?”, *The New York Times*, November 15, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/16/opinion/sunday/thomas-l-friedman-who-are-we.html>

³¹ Hugh Muir, “Muslim names harm job chances.” *The Guardian*. July 12, 2004. <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2004/jul/12/discriminationatwork.workandcareers>.



employees alike. This is what has happened with the legally invited workforce in the UK, France, Germany, Austria, Denmark, and Sweden. As we pointed out at the onset of the paper, we are not talking about the involuntary movement of people due to political unrests or wars. Instead, we are talking about people that are *invited*, are *documented*, and are given *permission* to stay in a country. The host countries, we argue, failed to do their homework before bringing in the foreign workforce. The people that were brought in to help 60 years ago have become a social and an economic burden; their children and grandchildren have not fully assimilated into the local cultures and the result is a generation of the discontented and disenfranchised young men and women engaging in counter-productive activities. The past cannot be undone. However, there may be lessons that we may learn from the mistakes made in the past.

There was a disconnect between the industries that invited the foreign workers and the cultural mindsets and readiness of the local citizens. The industries brought in inexpensive labor to cut their production costs and improve their bottom-lines. The workers, in the cases of the UK, France, Germany, and Sweden, came from different cultures, spoke different languages, practiced different religions, and possessed sets of values, customs, and outlooks that were dissimilar from the host countries. Most of the foreign workers were young men. This became an additional factor in creating tension between the local men and the foreign workers. The local perception was that the foreign workers, not only took their jobs but also the women from the local men. The local people had no voice in inviting the foreign workers. The local cultures and the local governments were unprepared to receive, socialize with, and accommodate the guest workers.

Little attention was paid to the housing and social adjustment of the invited workers. The result is a social clustering: people that share a common language or a common cultural background move into one neighborhood. For instance, the Sikhs in the South Hall area of London, and the Bangladeshis in Brick Lane, East London. Result: the foreign workers did not assimilate into the local cultures but developed their own ghettos. This happened in England, in France, in Germany, and in Sweden.

History is unalterable. The oversights regarding workforce/immigration policies or the lack of integration efforts are impossible to correct retroactively. However, we believe that we can learn from these experiences and implement “smart” immigration policies. The authors recommend four specific steps.

Concrete plans should be in place for housing, healthcare, education, and

social needs of the guest workers and their families. Housing should be ready and available before the arrival of the immigrants. The healthcare facilities should be up and running with sufficient professional staff. The schools for the children should be ready and staffed adequately. There should be sufficient language teachers and social workers trained to work with the new immigrants.

The costs for the above should be shouldered by the employers that want to bring in the workforce. This may be a University wanting to invite scholars, a pharmaceutical company needing researchers, or a transportation company needing drivers and technicians. These and other such entities are the ones that benefit from the foreign workers; such entities should pay their fair share. Simply paying the guest workers equal wages and benefits is not enough.

As a matter of democratic principles, the communities and the cities that will receive the new workers should participate in such discussions. The people that will arrive as guest workers should be educated/briefed about the cultural differences that await them in a foreign country. There is a need for orientation and briefing programs that inform them about what is expected, what is permissible, what is disallowed, and what may be shunned in the host culture.

In conclusion, voluntary displacement, migrating to a foreign country, is a serious commitment for the host country as well as the invited. Both parties should be aware of all the terms, conditions, and clauses of the agreement before signing on. Agreements entered with incomplete knowledge and insufficient information, we believe, are the causes of the issues with the immigrant populations in Europe. Thus, there is a need for the host country to spell out the differences and expectations. There is a need for a greater level of openness in communication from all parties involved. As has been witnessed, neglecting to communicate and relying on oversimplification such as, "I need worker, you need work, what can go wrong?" has shown that plenty can, and has, gone wrong.

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