

Foreword

When I was a kid, the words “Europe” and “migration” were clearly associated: Europe was the place where migrants were coming from!

During my primary school years at the Deutsche Schule in Montevideo, in the early sixties of the last century, many of my classmates were Jews whose parents had fled persecution in Central Europe, most of my teachers had been physically and perhaps also emotionally traumatised by the war and more than a few of them decided to stay in South America. The shop at the corner where I bought groceries was owned by a Galician who had promised not to return to Spain while Franco was still alive and my grandmother would curse in Italian, her father’s language.

A decade later, in the seventies, when dictatorial regimes all over Latin America sent thousands of people into forced exile to escape prison, torture or “disappearance”, Europe generously welcomed many of them, giving abstract words like Human Rights and solidarity a very tangible meaning. During the eighties Europe had reconstructed and Latin America had destructed its industrial base in the name of economic liberalisation and the migration flow reversed. A never renounced 1890 treaty between Uruguay and Spain giving citizens of each country the right to residence in the other proved to have been of unilateral effect. When my co-nationals tried to invoke it in Spain, the Schengen rules prevailed.

For people in many parts of the world, particularly those living in what are called “developing” countries, Europe is seen as both a source of hope and a cause of despair. Hope, because of its continued promotion of fundamental values of Human Rights, the rule of law and good governance; despair because all too often its actions fail to live up to those values.

This European Social Watch report focuses on the role of Europe in the world. Europe is an important global actor. Decisions taken in Europe impact on people all over the world.

Europe is the main provider of aid to developing countries and poverty eradication is one of the explicit goals of EU policies. For Social Watch, Europe’s commitment to social values, and the system of social protection that has been established across the continent is equally important. For people living in Europe these values underpin the fight against poverty. For the rest of us they provide a model towards which to aspire.

This report’s focus on migration is very apt. Migration is a human interface between countries, continents and civilisations. Millions of Europeans migrated out in the last two centuries. And DNA tests have proven, in turn, that modern Europeans are the result of continuous waves of migration. In the past migration used to be a one way movement. Now many migrants stay just a short time. They build a bridge between Europe and other parts of the world and they contribute to both.

The attraction that Europe exerts should be considered an asset, not a liability. It means that Europe has something to offer to the world. Yet, the way that Europe relates and treats migrants is crucially important as an indicator of its relations with the rest of the world. Immigration is an opportunity for Europe to demonstrate its commitment to Human Rights and development. After all, Europe’s prosperity is largely built upon movements of people.

Migration was chosen as the theme of the first European Social Watch report in recognition of its major internal and external implications for Europe. The initiative to produce a European Social Watch report was born out of the desire to strengthen a common European identity for the many Social Watch coalitions in European countries, while addressing an issue of global consequences. ■

ROBERTO BISSIO
Social Watch international secretariat