



International Organization for Migration (IOM)



EU-China Dialogue on Migration and Mobility Support Project

支持中欧人员往来和移民领域对话项目



International Labour Organization

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## Emigration Trends and Policies in China: Movement of the Wealthy and Highly Skilled

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*Beijing, 9 January, 2018*  
**Summary Report**

On 9 January 2018, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) organized a briefing on ***Emigration Trends and Policies in China*** for fourteen officials from nine EU Member States Embassies in Beijing. Mr. XIANG Biao, Professor of Social Anthropology at Oxford University (UK) gave a presentation on emigration trends and policies in China particularly movement of the wealthy and highly skilled. This activity was carried out under the framework of the *EU-China Dialogue on Migration and Mobility Support Project*.

Prof. XIANG Biao is an experienced expert working on various types of migration—internal and international, unskilled and highly-skilled, emigration, left behind and return—in China, India and Australia.

During the presentation, Prof. XIANG highlighted that official data showed that China has a negative emigration ration, meaning that China still sends more migrants abroad than it receives new immigrants. Also, China still has a very low percentage of migrants compared to its total population.

China in the past had a trend of irregular migration, which now has drastically been reduced. As is well known, provinces that traditionally used to supply considerable numbers of irregular migrants, such as Fujian and Guangdong, don't have many people willing to pay money to irregularly go aboard since in the last years China has made it much easier to travel abroad, due to the so called 'Exit Revolution'<sup>1</sup>. Most irregular migrants, nowadays, travel regularly abroad, for example using tourism visas, but then overstay breaking the visa conditions, a phenomenon that is still being observed in European countries.

Since 2002, the Chinese Ministries of Public Security, Human Resources and Social Security, Education and Transportation jointly issued a statement on allowing private companies to facilitate outbound migration from China and act as commercial intermediaries, which created more channels for Chinese migration. This has resulted in two general trends where the Chinese highly skilled and wealthy are in increasing numbers emigrating to the global north whilst the number of low-skilled and unskilled Chinese migrants is declining and their destination more and more being the global south. Wealthy Chinese have plenty of options to migrate as investment migrants who invest large amounts of money in destination countries and the high-skilled migrants can easily settle down in destination countries, however the unskilled migrants had to return back to their home counties after a few years to respect the conditions of their migration according to both Chinese and destination countries immigration rules.

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<sup>1</sup> Exit Revolution: term used by Prof. Xiang to describe the liberalization of the travel market for Chinese nationals, allowing individual freedom to travel.



Prof. XIANG also mentioned that issues of social inequality partially influenced the general increase of outmigration from China. In 1990s, relevant new Chinese policies about ID, private passport and contractual labour relationship made the labour market more flexible and became a driver for Chinese labourers to think about working abroad. Importantly, Chinese people could purchase their housing in late 1990's, providing an asset and they can use as security to apply for a bank loan and sign commercial contract with an intermediary agent to go abroad.

In that period, the Chinese government agreed more intermediary agents to be involved with Chinese outmigration. Prof. Xiang also explained the different reasons of “high-end” outmigration and “low-end” outmigration from China. Comparing with high-end migrants’ seeking high quality of life and capital relocation, “low-end” migrants often engaged with construction, manufacturing and agricultural sectors in the destination countries. Chinese high-skilled migrants often migrated into Australia, Canada and USA that are wealthy countries, low-skilled migrants are traditional classic productive labor force that prefer going to Singapore, Korean and Japan.

Following the presentation, there was an extensive discussion between the participants and Prof. Xiang. Prof. XIANG commented that Chinese migration to Europe was diversified. Some European countries had investment schemes to attract migrants such as Portugal, Greece, Malta. Germany and UK are attractive to Chinese young students to study because of its either free or a very good education system. Low skilled migrants do not have much chance to migrate to Europe except as chefs and nurses to mainly Austria, Germany and the UK. Much of the other low skilled Chinese migrants in Europe are found in Italy which has a historic community of migrants from Wenzhou of Jiangsu province, who were attracting their friends and relatives to migrate to Italy. In general, Chinese individuals relied on Chinese agencies to work in Europe rather than accessing Europe individually. In addition, European companies and Chinese workers don't have direct intermediaries to facilitate recruitment process between two sides as is the preferred way by Chinese institutions. Before 2002, the Chinese government made a high control on migration issues. Since taking over the responsibility of labour migration issues by Ministry of Commerce in 2008, the Chinese government pays more attention on managing labour migration from market-oriented perspectives. The Ministry of Public Security oversees regulating the exit and entry agencies that wealthy people usually use to migrate overseas. The migration landscape in China is fragmented as, for example, the agents or companies that operate in the business of labour migration are not allowed to do business related to education migration. Prof. Xiang shared his thoughts and hypothesis that he sees a trend that soon the Chinese government will become stricter and more professional with Chinese migration. Moreover, China will try to attract more high skilled migrants to China. The imminent possible re-structuring of Chinese immigration organization will also influence future Chinese migration policy.

Following a question on irregular Chinese migration to Europe, Prof. Xiang replied that there are no clear data and statistics on it because of its nature of being a closed underground community. There is a scheme that sees some Chinese people used the reason of attending an exhibition, conference or fair in Europe to then overstay and become irregular migrants. Following another question in relation to visa facilitation, Prof. Xiang pinpointed that an easier visa application procedure could attract more Chinese tourists to a particular destination. The participants also



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touched upon the difficult identification process of illegal Chinese migrants in Europe and returning them back to China is often a challenge. Prof. Xiang and the participants also exchanged views on the possible effects of the One Belt One Road Initiative on the migration flows between China and Europe, since it will see better transportation links but also more interaction between Chinese companies and European companies.

This briefing provided European officials a useful chance to learn update information and new trends of Chinese emigration. The active discussions and exchanges were beneficial to make European officials better understand Chinese emigration development, which will strengthen the dialogue about facilitating legal migration and prevention illegal migration between Europe and China.