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## The Belt and Road Initiative. Demographic trends, labour markets and welfare systems of member countries

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# **The Belt and Road Initiative.**

**Demographic trends, labour markets and  
welfare systems of member countries**

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## Abstract

A brief analysis of the different demographic tendencies that will affect the 65 countries of the Belt and Road Initiative allows to point out that they are largely spread along the path of the demographic transition so that in some working age population will dramatically decline, in others will dramatically increase. The implication is that the first group of countries (epitomized by China, Russia, Thailand, but also by Singapore) will be affected by a structural shortage of labour, the second (well represented by India, but also by Pakistan, Egypt and Philippines) by a structural excess of labour. Therefore, for the countries of the first group immigration will not be an option but a necessity, while for the countries of the second group emigration will not be an option but a necessity. The situation suggests that it would be in the interest of all BRI countries to design, develop and implement a policy framework that would allow them to jointly manage migration flows in the amount and with the educational stricture coherent with their needs. However, such a process is extremely difficult and complex and to succeed needs to be properly directed and orchestrated. The paper argues that given its size, the dimension of its need of foreign labour, and its role in the Belt and Road Initiative it is China that should take the lead of a rational approach that falls well inside the strategies of the Initiative.

Key words: Belt and Road Initiative, China, migration, labour market, demographic transition, demographic polarization.

JEL codes: J11, J2, J61

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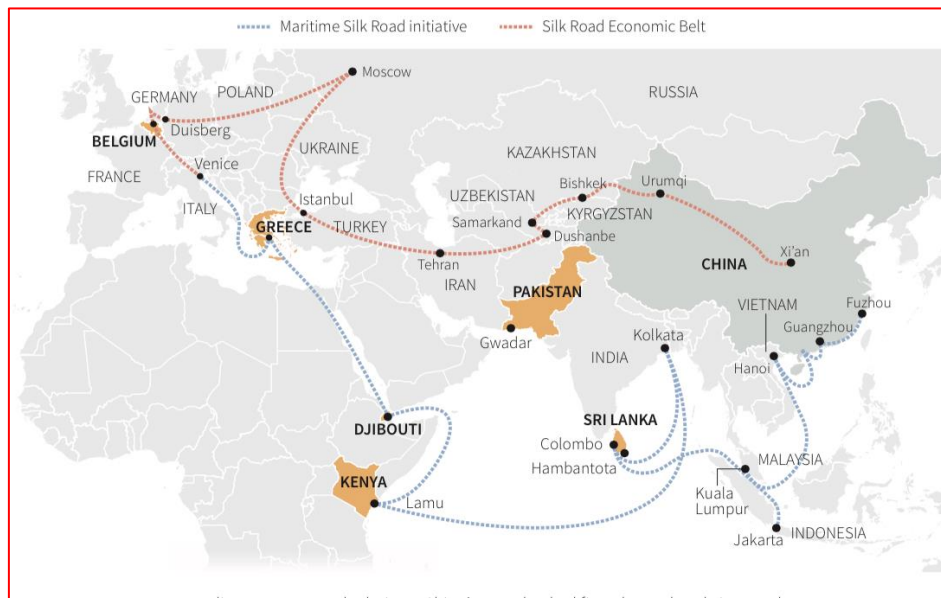
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## Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI<sup>1</sup>), in the Chinese political agenda since 2013<sup>2</sup> and identified as a key priority of the country's Thirteenth Five-Year Plan (2016–2020), aims to revive the ancient Silk Road<sup>3</sup> in a modern perspective. According to the Chinese government, its primary aim is to promote regional connectivity and cooperation between a large numbers of countries (China and 64 Asian, European, and African countries<sup>4</sup>), by promoting economic co-operation, enhancing the orderly free-flow of economic factors and the efficient allocation of resources, and furthering market integration (Wang, 2015 and 2016). It also plays a central role in Xi's fight for the “great Renaissance of the the Chinese nation” (Liu Wei, 2018).

Member countries will be connected by 5 routes :

- three land routes linking 1) China to Europe through Central Asia and Russia, 2) China with the Middle East through Central Asia, 3) China and Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Indian Ocean
- two maritime roads, the first linking China with Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean (4), the second connecting China with the South Pacific Ocean through the South China Sea (5).



The backbone of the project is represented by massive infrastructure projects that could amount to \$1 trillion and span across Asia, Africa and Europe. This audacious modern version of the Marshal plan is expected to provide a new market for Chinese steel, cement and machinery in a phase in which the national demand is declining. At the same time there is no doubt that the “China’s Belt and Road initiative is starting to deliver useful infrastructures, bringing new trade routes and better connectivity to Asia and Europe” (Tom Miller, 2017), while China “is forging ties, creating new markets for the country’s construction companies as overcapacity is looming and exporting its model of state-led development in a quest to create deep economic connections and strong diplomatic relationships” (Perlez and Huang, 2017).

<sup>1</sup> Until 2016 it was known as One Belt and One Road Initiative (OBOR).

<sup>2</sup> The initiative was “unveiled” by Xi Jinping at the end of 2013 and was promoted by Premier Li Keqiang during his visits in Europe and Asia to be then largely publicized by the Chinese Press; in the following years numerous conferences and events have been organized in numerous countries (see the Belt and Road Portal, <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/index.htm>).

<sup>3</sup> The name Silk Rod was coined by Baron Ferdinand von Richthofena German traveller, geographer and scientist who made seven expeditions to China from 1868 to 1872.

<sup>4</sup> The countries in the initiative jointly account for around 30% of world GDP

The Chinese initiative is evoking the concern that China will try to create “a new kind of globalization that will dispense with the rules of the aging Western-dominated institutions” (Perlez and Huang, 2017), while Western powers are withdrawing from global governance and anti-globalization movements are getting momentum in the USA and some EU countries.

In this situation China has already expressed its willingness and readiness to contribute more to global challenges and to become a “responsible stakeholder” in the international system<sup>5</sup>. There is no doubt that the BRI will amplify China’s influence worldwide, but it could also provide additional resources, best practices, and expertise badly needed by developing countries (Liu Wei, 2018) in which, for the moment, the existing global order has not brought political peace, social order, and economic development.

Up to now the main focus of this ambitious program has been on infrastructure, construction materials, railways and highways, automobile, real estate, power grid, iron and steel. Little or no attention has been paid to the human factor that appears only mentioned when it is indicated that one of the aim of the initiative is to create people-to-people bonds and promote exchanges and dialogues between different cultures.

The demographic transition that by now is affecting all the countries of the world will produce a demographic polarization between a declining number of countries whose total population and working age population will decline and a decreasing number of countries (the poorest in the world) in which they will literally explode (Bruni, 2012a and 2017a). The population of the BRI amounts to over 60% of world population and its member countries are in different phases of the demographic transition and are therefore affected by different demographic trends. In the first part of the paper it will be shown that the BRI countries will be affected by the same demographic polarization of the world en large.

The paper will then analyse the impact of such trends on the labour markets of the BRI countries, their implications for the sustainability of the welfare systems and discuss the existence of an “internal” demographic complementarity that, if correctly exploited, could become an important asset of the Initiative.

A basic tenant of the following analysis is that population is not an exogenous variable whose future values can be forecast on the basis of independent assumptions on fertility, mortality and migration; on the contrary its evolution is and must be seen as the result of the interaction between the demographic and economic spheres and the resulting migration flows. The starting analysis will therefore be based on the demographic trends estimated in absence on migration and more specifically on the zero migration scenarios produced by the United Nations Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA, 2017).

## **Demographic characteristics of the BRI countries**

The 65 countries of the BRI differ under many political, economic, and social aspects. Considering only the demographic aspects, the BRI includes the two most populous countries of the world (China and India), and other five countries with more than 100 million inhabitants (Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Russia, and Philippines). These seven countries account for 77.4% of BRI total population and 48.2% of world population. The BRI includes also some of the smallest countries in the world: 15 have a population between 5 and 10 million, and 22 below five million.

In 2015, with a total population of 4.6 billion inhabitants, the BRI accounted for 62.3% of the world population (Table 1). In a zero migration scenario (UN DESA, 2017) its population is projected to increase to almost 5.2 billion in 2030 and to 5.6 billion in 2060. However, the natural rate of growth of the BRI population is projected to be much lower than that of the Rest of the world (RoW) so that its share will decline to 60.6% by 2030, and to 54.8% by 2060.

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<sup>5</sup> For instance Zhang Jun, head of the Department of International Economic Affairs in China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has noted that if Western nations withdraw, a rising power like China could be forced to step in: “If China is required to play that leadership role, then China will assume its responsibilities.”

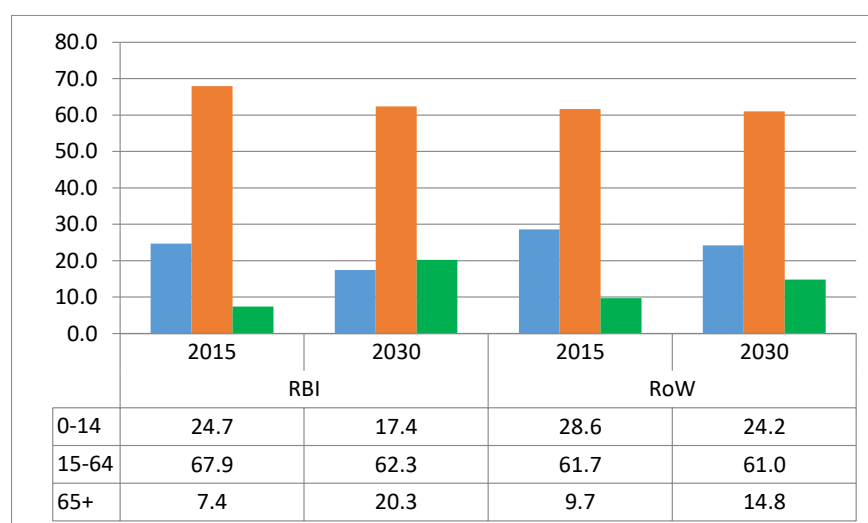
**Table 1 – World, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Rest of the World (RoW); population by main age group; 2015, 2030 and 2060**

	0-14	15-64	65+	Total		0-14	15-64	65+	Total
	<b>RBI</b>					<b>World</b>			
2015	1,135	3,125	342	4,601	2015	1,931	4,841	612	7,383
2030	1,106	3,480	596	5,182	2030	2,026	5,528	998	8,552
2060	976	3,494	1,135	5,604	2060	2,092	6,309	1,818	10,219
2015-30	-28	354	254	580	2015-30	96	688	386	1,169
2030-60	-131	14	539	423	2030-60	66	781	820	1,667
2015-60	-159	369	793	1,003	2015-60	162	1,469	1,206	2,836
	<b>Rest of the world</b>					<b>RBI/World</b>			
2015	796	1,715	270	2,782	2015	58.8	64.6	55.8	62.3
2030	920	2,049	402	3,371	2030	54.6	62.9	59.7	60.6
2060	1,117	2,815	683	4,615	2060	46.6	55.4	62.4	54.8
2015-30	124	333	132	589	2015-30	-4.2	-1.6	3.9	-1.7
2030-60	197	767	280	1,244	2030-60	-8.0	-7.6	2.8	-5.7
2015-60	321	1,100	412	1,833	2015-60	-12.1	-9.2	6.6	-7.5

Source: Elaboration on UN DESA data; UN DESA, 2017

At the same time, the ageing process of the BRI will be more pronounced than that of the RoW. In 2015 the age structure of the RoW was more skewed with the young representing 28.6% and the elderly 9.7%, while the corresponding values of the BRI countries were 24.7% and 7.4% (Graph 1). In 2060 the percentage of elderly in the BRI is expected to climb to 20.3% versus a value of 14.8% of the RoW, where still almost 1/4 of the total population will be below 15 years of age.

**Figure 1 - Belt and Road Initiative and Rest of the World; percentage composition of total population by main age group; 2015 and 2030**



Source: Elaboration on UN DESA data; UN DESA, 2017

## China and India

In the next 50 years the BRI countries will be affected by different demographic trends that are well exemplified by China and India.

Between 2015 and 2060, China and India will both register a sharp decline of the young and a notable increase of the elderly (Table 2). However, in India working age population (WAP) will increase by 30%, in China it will decline by almost 28% (Table 3).

As a consequence:

- In China total population will decline by 5%, in India it will increase by 30%, making India the largest country in the BRI<sup>6</sup>;
- In China the percentage of elderly will pass the 30% mark, in India it will reach only 20.5%.

**Table 2 – China and India; population by main age group; total values (in million) and percentage composition; 2015, 2030 and 2060**

	China							
	Absolute value				Percentage composition			
	0-14	15-64	65+	Total	0-14	15-64	65+	Total
2015	247	1,015	135	1,397	17.7	72.6	9.7	100.0
2030	223	978	246	1,447	15.4	67.6	17.0	100.0
2060	182	731	395	1,308	13.9	55.9	30.2	100.0
	India							
	Absolute value				Percentage composition			
	0-14	15-64	65+	Total	0-14	15-64	65+	Total
2015	375	860	74	1,309	28.7	65.7	5.6	100.0
2030	358	1,034	128	1,521	23.6	68.0	8.4	100.0
2060	299	1,124	281	1,704	17.6	65.9	16.5	100.0

Source: Elaboration on UN DESA data; UN DESA, 2017

**Table 3 – China and India; population by main age group; absolute change (in million) and percentage change; 2015-30, 2030-60 and 2015-60**

	China							
	Absolute change				Percentage change			
	0-14	15-64	65+	Total	0-14	15-64	65+	Total
2015-30	-24	-37	111	50	-9.8	-3.6	82.0	3.6
2030-60	-41	-247	149	-139	-18.4	-25.2	60.7	-9.6
2015-60	-65	-284	260	-89	-26.4	-27.9	192.5	-6.3
	India							
	Absolute value				Percentage composition			
	0-14	15-64	65+	Total	0-14	15-64	65+	Total
2015-30	-17	174	54	212	-4.5	20.2	73.7	16.2
2030-60	-59	89	153	184	-16.4	8.7	119.5	12.1
2015-60	-76	264	208	395	-20.2	30.6	281.3	30.2

Source: Elaboration on UN DESA data; UN DESA, 2017

## The main phases of the demographic transition

At the origin of these different demographic trends is a complex phenomenon known as demographic transition (DT) that is defined as the passage from a traditional regime characterized by high rates of mortality and fertility to a modern regime characterized by a low rate of mortality and fertility.

The inception of the DT process is determined by the socioeconomic and cultural development reached by a country; therefore, different countries entered the DT in different moments of time and in any given moment of time are in different phases of the process (Bruni, 2017a).

<sup>6</sup> This is the result proposed by the zero migration scenario by UN DESA (UN DESA, 2017). There is theoretical and empirical evidence to sustain that this will not happen since the structural labour shortage of China will determine immigration flows that will increase the Chinese population (Bruni, 2014), while the structural excess of labour that will affect India will cause emigration outflows that will at least partially counterbalance the natural growth of the Indian population.



To better understand the impact of the DT, it can be useful to consider the three phases that all countries have to go through, in absence of migrations (Table 4):

1. In the first, the death rate declines mainly as a consequence of the decline in infant and child mortality, while the birth rate remains at the original level; therefore the share of young people increases, while the total population increases at an increasing rate<sup>7</sup> .
2. In the second phase, the birth rate starts to decline, progressively converging toward the death rate; therefore total population continues to increase, but at a decreasing rate; due to the arrival of cohorts of increasing size, the share of working age population (WAP) increases, while the share of young declines; it is at the end of this phase that the ageing process starts;
3. The third phase begins when the birth rate falls below the death rate; this implies a decline in total population and an increase in the share of the elderly, while the shares of WAP and of the young decline.

**Table 4 - The phases of the demographic transition**

	First phase	Second phase	Third phase
Mortality rate	Declines rapidly	Declines	Increases
Birth rate	Remains constant	Declines and converge toward the mortality rate	Not defined
Natural rate of growth	Increases	Declines	Becomes negative and its absolute value increases
Share of young people	Increases	Declines	Continue to decline
Share of working age population	Declines	Increases	Declines
Share of elderly	Declines	Start to increase at the end of the phase	Increases at an increasing rate

## A demographic classification of the BRI into three country-groups

On the basis of the two demographic patterns that characterize China and India, we can classify the other 63 countries of the BRI into three “demographic” groups depending on their demographic trends in two periods, 2015-2030 and 2030-2060:

1. The first group includes the countries where WAP will decline in both periods, as in China;
2. The second group includes the countries where WAP will increase in the first period and decline in the second;
3. The third group includes the countries where WAP will increase in both periods, as in India.

The first group includes 25 countries, the second 14, and the third 26<sup>8</sup>.

The countries in the first group entered the DT early and have been proceeding along its path for a long period or have proceeded, as in the case of China , at high speed (Bruni, 2018). Therefore, in all of them the TFR is well below the replacement level of 2.1 children per

<sup>7</sup> This is due to the fact that the decline in mortality of then young brings a high and increasing number of boys and girls to reach the reproduction stage in a situation in which the birth rate is still at the “traditional” level.

<sup>8</sup> For a full list of the countries in the three groups see Tables 8, 9, and 10.

woman: in 2015 the average TFR was 1.53, and according to UN DESA it should not be back to replacement level by 2060. In spite of these common demographic features, the countries of this group largely differ with respect to geographical position, religion, and population size. Five of them are in Asia, the other 20 are in Europe. The group includes countries whose population is predominantly Buddhist, Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. Finally, while China is the most populous country in the world, Russia has about 144 million inhabitants, the total population of 6 countries is included between 5 and 10 million, in 11 countries is between 1 and 5 million, and one country has less than 1 million inhabitants.

In 2015 the total population of the second group accounted for less than 6% of the total BRI population. Generally speaking and as a group, these countries are lagging behind the countries of the first group along the path of the DT. The average level of their TFR is 2.1, the national levels being just above or just below the replacement level. This group includes 6 south and south-eastern Asian countries and 8 western Asian countries, including six Arab states that border the Persian Gulf (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates). The two largest countries are Iran and Vietnam, followed by Saudi Arabia. All the countries of this group, but Bhutan, are Muslim countries.

The third group is the largest both by number of countries (26) and total population: in 2015 it accounted for 54.9% of total BRI population. The countries of this group are the less advanced along the path of the DT; the average TFR is 3.2 children per woman, with values ranging from the maximum of 5.9 registered in Timor Leste and the minimum of 2.1 registered in Sri Lanka. All of them, but Egypt, are in Asia and all main religious beliefs are represented. This group includes some of the most populous countries on the planet. Beside India, there are other 5 countries (Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Philippines, and Egypt) whose population is already, or shortly will be, in excess of 100 million; together with India these 5 countries account for more than 80% of the total population of the group.

## The demographic trends of the three demographic groups

To fully appreciate the way in which the DT is going to progressively impact on the three groups of countries, we will analyze the demographic trends that will characterize each group in the two periods between 2015 and 2030, and between 2030 and 2060 (Table 5).

In the first period (2015-2030) we can observe that:

- i. The rate of growth of **total population** gets bigger, moving from the first to the third group: the population of the first group is projected to register a marginal increase of 2%, that of the second of 14.6%, and that of the third of 19.6%. Given its size the increase registered by the third group (494 million) accounts for 86.6% of BRI total population growth, those of the first (36 million) and of the second (40 million) accounting respectively for 6.4% and 7%;
- ii. In the first group the **young** people are expected to decline by 9.7%, in the second by 3.3%, while in the third the share of the young will remain substantially constant;
- iii. The **WAP** of first group will decline by 5.2% (-67 million); that of the second will increase by 12.5% (40 million) and that of the third by 23.9% (391 million). Therefore, between 2015 and 2030, the increase of WAP registered by the BRI is almost completely concentrated in the third group;
- iv. The rate of growth of the **elderly** is positive in all three groups and decreases moving from the first to the third group of countries: 53% of the additional elderly of the BRI will be in the countries of the first group, 7% in the countries of the second and 40% in those of the third.

**Table 5 - Population by main age group in the BRI and in three demographic groups of countries; absolute value in 2015, 2030 and 2060; absolute change and percentage change in 2015-2030 and 2030-2060; absolute values in million.**

	Total				First group			
	0-14	15-64	65+	Total	0-14	15-64	65+	Total
	Absolute values							
2015	1,135	3,125	342	4,601	313	1,296	192	1,802
2030	1,104	3,474	594	5,172	283	1,229	326	1,838
2060	973	3,485	1,134	5,591	233	924	492	1,649
	Absolute change							
2015-30	-31	348	253	571	-30	-67	134	36
2030-60	-131	11	539	420	-50	-306	166	-189
2015-60	-162	360	792	990	-80	-372	299	-153
	Percentage change							
2015-30	-2.7	11.1	74.0	12.4	-9.7	-5.2	69.4	2.0
2030-60	-11.9	0.3	90.8	8.1	-17.5	-24.9	50.8	-10.3
2015-60	-14.3	11.5	232.0	21.5	-25.5	-28.7	155.5	-8.5
	Second group				Third group			
	0-14	15-64	65+	Total	0-14	15-64	65+	Total
	Absolute values							
2015	64	195	15	273	757	1,634	135	2,526
2030	62	219	32	313	759	2,025	236	3,020
2060	52	195	91	338	687	2,366	551	3,605
	Absolute change							
2015-30	-2	24	18	40	2	391	102	494
2030-60	-9	-25	59	25	-72	342	315	584
2015-60	-12	0	76	65	-70	733	417	1079
	Percentage change							
2015-30	-3.3	12.5	121.4	14.6	0.2	23.9	75.6	19.6
2030-60	-15.3	-11.3	183.2	7.8	-9.5	16.9	133.3	19.4
2015-60	-18.2	-0.2	526.9	23.6	-9.3	44.8	309.7	42.7

Source: Elaboration on UN DESA data; UN DESA, 2017

In the second period (2030-2060):

- i. **Total population** will decline only in the first group (-10.5%); it will increase by 7.8% in the second and by 19.4% in the third;
- ii. The **Young** will decline in all three groups, the decrease being progressively less pronounced moving from the first group, -17.5% (-50 million), to the second, -15.3% (-9 million), to the third, -9.5% (-72 million);
- iii. **WAP** is projected to decline in the 39 countries of the first and second group; in the first group the expected decline is projected to be equal to 306 million (that is almost 1/4 of the 2030 level), while in second the absolute decline is expected to be relatively modest in absolute terms (25 million), but will represent 11.3% of the initial value. In the third group WAP will increase by 342 million (16.9%), an increase that is just sufficient to offset the decline of the other countries;
- iv. The **elderly** will increase in all three groups: 166 million (50.8%) in the first, 59 million (183.2%) in the second, and 355 million (133%) in the third, so that between 2015 and 2060 the number of elderly in the BRI countries is projected to increase by 792 million.

## Population structure by main age groups

The trends we have just outlined will be paralleled by dramatic changes in the population age structure; they will reflect the progress of the demographic transition in each group of countries, while the relative position of each group will remain unchanged.

Figure 2 shows that in all the three groups of countries the share of the young will decline (Figure 2a) and the share of the elderly will increase (Figure 2c), the ranking of the three groups remaining the same in both cases.

In the first and second group of countries (that are already at the end of the second phase of the DT) the share of WAP will register a very consistent decline; in the third group, whose countries are still in the initial phase of the DT, the share of WAP will increase (Figure 2b).

**Figure 2 – BRI; evolution of main age groups in the demographic groups of countries; 2015-2060**

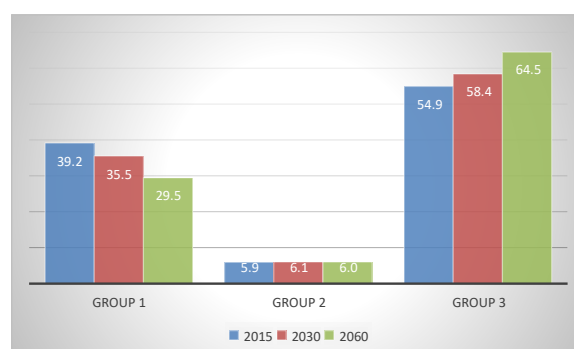


Source: Elaboration on UN DESA data; UN DESA, 2017

In conclusion, over the 2015-2060 period:

- The total population of the BRI is projected to increase by almost 1 billion (21.5%);
- This is due to the decline of the young by 162 million (-14.3%), an increase of WAP by 360 million (+11.5%) and an increase of the elderly by 792 million (+232%);
- As a consequence, the percentage of the young will notably decline (from 24.7% to 17.4 %), that of the elderly notably increase (from 7.4% to 20.3%), while the share of WAP will lose 5.6 percentage points, from 67.9% to 62.3% (Figure 2d).

**Figure 3 – BRI; demographic groups of countries; share of total population in 2015, 2030 and 2060**



Source: Elaboration on UN DESA data; UN DESA, 2017

At the same time, the increase of the total population of the BRI is the result of the decline registered by the first group, of a small increase registered by the second, and of a huge increase (1.07 billion) registered by the third. As a consequence, the demographic weight of the first

group will decline by almost ten percentage points that will be gained by the third, while the share of the second will remain substantially unchanged (Figure 3).

## **The national level**

Previous data clearly suggest that the ageing process that will invest all the countries of the BRI, spreading from those more advanced along the path of the demographic transition to those that, by now, are just at the beginning.

Table 6 reports the ranking of the percentage of elderly in the 65 countries of the BRI in 2015, 2030 and 2060 and provides a detailed vision of the problem. Some summary data can however help to understand the magnitude and pervasiveness of the process at a glance.

In 2015 only Bulgaria registered a percentage of elderly above 20%, while in 40 countries the percentage was below 10%. In 2030 16 countries are projected to register values over 20% and the number of countries with values below 10% will drop to 31. In 2060 in two countries the percentage will reach 50%, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates; in 15 it will be between 30% and 40%, in 25 between 20% and 30%, in 19 between 10% and 20% and only in 5 below 10%. Moreover, while by now the ranking is led by European countries with Singapore and Thailand still preceding China, in 2060 the ranking will be led by the Gulf States with Singapore in the third place.

These shocking data are raising a growing concern for the financial sustainability of the pension and long-term care systems. However, equally or even more worrying is the trend of WAP, the source of human resources that will be responsible for production, economic growth, the provision of the contribution necessary to sustain the pension system and of the services required by the growing number of elderly.

In this perspective it is important to remember that ageing is a relative phenomenon that is due not only to the increase of the number of elderly people, but also to the decline of the other age groups, and notably of the people in working age (Bruni, 2018).

**Table 6 – Ranking of the countries BRI by the percentage of elderly over total population; 2015, 2030, and 2060**

	2015		2030		2060
Bulgaria	20.1	Slovenia	25.9	Qatar	50.2
Latvia	19.3	Singapore	24.5	United Arab Emirates	49.3
Croatia	18.9	Croatia	24.3	Singapore	39.4
Estonia	18.8	Estonia	23.2	Poland	35.2
Lithuania	18.7	Bulgaria	23.2	Slovenia	33.6
Slovenia	18.0	Poland	23.1	Oman	33.1
Czechia	18.0	Czechia	23.0	Bahrain	33.1
Hungary	17.5	Lithuania	22.8	Czechia	32.6
Romania	17.0	B&H	22.8	Slovakia	31.6
Serbia	16.3	Latvia	22.6	B&H	31.5
Ukraine	15.9	Hungary	22.2	Croatia	31.4
B&H	15.7	Slovakia	20.9	Thailand	30.9
Poland	15.6	Romania	20.7	Hungary	30.9
Georgia	14.6	Serbia	20.4	Maldives	30.8
Belarus	14.3	Ukraine	20.3	Moldova	30.3
Slovakia	14.1	Montenegro	20.0	China	30.2
Montenegro	13.9	Belarus	19.8	Estonia	30.0
Russia	13.5	Albania	19.6	Iran	29.8
Albania	12.5	Russia	19.6	Romania	29.1
TFYR Macedonia	12.5	Thailand	19.5	Bulgaria	28.7
Singapore	11.7	Georgia	18.1	TFYR Macedonia	28.5
Israel	11.2	TFYR Macedonia	18.1	Albania	28.3
Armenia	10.9	Moldova	17.1	Latvia	28.2
Thailand	10.6	China	17.0	Montenegro	27.6
Moldova	9.9	Armenia	16.9	Ukraine	27.5
China	9.7	Sri Lanka	14.7	Armenia	27.4
Sri Lanka	9.3	Israel	14.0	Kuwait	26.7
Lebanon	8.1	Vietnam	12.3	Lithuania	26.7
Turkey	7.8	Turkey	12.1	Brunei Darussalam	26.3
Kazakhstan	6.8	Lebanon	12.1	Serbia	26.3
Vietnam	6.7	Azerbaijan	11.7	Belarus	26.3
Malaysia	5.9	Brunei Darussalam	10.4	Lebanon	26.1
Azerbaijan	5.7	Kazakhstan	10.4	Vietnam	25.8
India	5.6	Malaysia	9.8	Russia	24.6
Nepal	5.5	Iran	9.8	Turkey	23.6
Myanmar	5.3	Myanmar	8.6	Georgia	22.9
Indonesia	5.1	India	8.4	Bhutan	22.8
Bangladesh	5.0	Bahrain	8.3	Malaysia	22.8
Iran	5.0	Indonesia	8.2	Saudi Arabia	22.1
Bhutan	4.7	Kuwait	8.0	Azerbaijan	21.7
Philippines	4.6	Uzbekistan	7.9	Sri Lanka	21.6
Pakistan	4.5	Bangladesh	7.6	Bangladesh	21.0
Kyrgyzstan	4.3	Kyrgyzstan	7.6	Israel	18.8
Uzbekistan	4.2	Maldives	7.5	Uzbekistan	17.8
Cambodia	4.1	Bhutan	7.4	India	16.5
Maldives	4.1	Saudi Arabia	7.2	Nepal	16.3
Brunei Darussalam	4.1	Nepal	7.1	Kazakhstan	16.0
Turkmenistan	4.1	Turkmenistan	7.0	Cambodia	15.5
Syria	4.0	Mongolia	7.0	Indonesia	15.5
Laos	3.9	United Arab Emirates	6.9	Mongolia	15.1
Mongolia	3.9	Philippines	6.7	Myanmar	14.9
Jordan	3.8	Cambodia	6.6	Laos	14.1
Timor	3.5	Qatar	6.5	Kyrgyzstan	13.6
Tajikistan	3.3	Syria	6.4	Syria	13.4
Iraq	3.1	Oman	5.8	Turkmenistan	13.3
Saudi Arabia	3.1	Tajikistan	5.6	Jordan	13.0
State of Palestine	3.0	Pakistan	5.5	Philippines	11.9
Yemen	2.9	Laos	5.4	Tajikistan	11.7
Afghanistan	2.5	Jordan	5.3	Pakistan	10.8
Bahrain	2.3	State of Palestine	4.0	State of Palestine	9.7
Oman	2.3	Timor	3.8	Yemen	8.9
Kuwait	2.1	Iraq	3.6	Afghanistan	7.6
Qatar	1.1	Yemen	3.4	Iraq	7.3
UAE	1.0	Afghanistan	3.1	Timor	6.1

Source: Elaboration on UN DESA data; UN DESA, 2017

Between 2015 and 2030 the natural balance of the WAP in the BRI will be positive since the expansion registered by the second and third group of countries will largely exceed the decline of the first. Between 2030 and 2060, the WAP of the BRI will on the contrary remain substantially stable since the decline registered by the WAP of the first group will become more consistent, WAP will decline also in the 14 countries of the second group, and the growth of WAP in the third group will notably diminish. As a matter of fact a closer look would show that around the middle of the century the WAP of the BRI will be decreasing.

Given the extremely different size of the 65 countries of the BRI, the absolute change of WAP is dominated by a few of them (Table 7).

On the negative side, over the 2015-2060 period, the major role is obviously played by China whose WAP is projected to decline by 284 million, followed by Russia (-29 million), Thailand (-15 million), Ukraine (-11.1 million), and Poland (-10 million), while the other countries characterized by a negative balance account all together for around 48 million with respect to a total decline of almost 400 million.

On the positive side, the dominant role is played by India whose WAP is expected to increase by 264 million, followed by Pakistan (+112 million), Egypt (+53 million), Indonesia and Philippines (+46 million each), Iraq (+40 million), Bangladesh and Afghanistan (+33 million each), Yemen (+22 million) and Syria (+11.6 million). The other countries whose WAP will decline by less than 10 million account for a total of 72 million (9.8%).

**Table 7 - Selected countries; working age population; absolute change in million (2015-30, 2030-60, 2015-60) and percentage change (2015-2060)**

	2015-30	2030-60	2015-60			2015-30	2030-60	2015-60	
	Absolute change		Abs. change	% change		Absolute change		Abs. change	% change
China	-36.8	-246.8	-283.6	71.4	India	174.0	89.5	263.5	36.0
Russia	-12.7	-16.1	-28.8	7.2	Pakistan	43.9	68.3	112.2	15.3
Thailand	-2.9	-12.1	-15.0	3.8	Egypt	19.2	33.8	53.0	7.2
Ukraine	-4.1	-6.9	-11.1	2.8	Indonesia	30.7	15.5	46.3	6.3
Poland	-3.0	-7.5	-10.5	2.6	Philippines	18.3	27.9	46.2	6.3
Others	-7.4	-40.8	-48.3	12.1	Iraq	11.3	29.2	40.6	5.5
Total	-66.9	-330.3	-397.2	100.0	Bangladesh	28.1	5.3	33.4	4.6
					Afghanistan	11.7	20.6	32.4	4.4
					Yemen	8.2	13.5	21.7	3.0
					Syria	5.1	6.6	11.6	1.6
					Others	40.3	31.5	71.7	9.8
					Total	390.8	341.8	732.6	100.0

Source: Elaboration on UN DESA data; UN DESA, 2017

From a labour market perspective, it is also very important to consider the percentage changes. Starting from group 1 (Table 8), in the first period 14 countries register a decline of WAP in excess of 10% and the only Asian country in this group is Singapore (-10.3%). Thailand ranks 20<sup>th</sup>, and China 23<sup>rd</sup> (-5.6%). In the second period the changes become more relevant (even discounting for the fact that the period lasts the double) for many countries, especially those in Asia. In this ranking Singapore is now second (-33.2%) after Slovenia, Thailand 7<sup>th</sup> (-26.2%), and China 12<sup>th</sup> (-25.2%). If we consider the 2015-2060 period we can see that the WAP of Singapore is projected to decline with respect to 2015 by 39.1%, that of Thailand by 30.6% and that of China by 27.9%.

The WAP of the second group of countries is subject to limited changes (Table 9). However, this is not necessarily true for the single countries. In fact, in the first period 10 of the 14 countries are expected to register a growth of WAP in excess of 10% which implies yearly average rates ranging from 0.7% to 1.4%. In the second period in two gulf countries (the United Arab Emirates and Qatar) the decline will be in excess of 50 percent which correspond to yearly values close to 2% and in other three gulf countries the yearly values will be included between 0.7% and 1.4%.



**Table 8 - First group of countries; working age population; total and yearly percentage change; 2015-30, 2030-60, and 2015-60**

		2015-30			2030-60			2015-60	
		Total	Yearly		Total	Yearly		Total	Yearly
1	Lithuania	-13.8	-0.9	Moldova	-33.7	-1.1	Moldova	-41.0	-0.9
2	Bulgaria	-13.7	-0.9	Singapore	-32.2	-1.1	Poland	-39.5	-0.9
3	Ukraine	-13.4	-0.9	Poland	-31.8	-1.1	Singapore	-39.1	-0.9
4	B&H	-12.7	-0.8	Hungary	-29.0	-1.0	Hungary	-37.6	-0.8
5	Russia	-12.6	-0.8	Bulgaria	-27.1	-0.9	Bulgaria	-37.1	-0.8
6	Latvia	-12.3	-0.8	Slovakia	-26.9	-0.9	Ukraine	-35.9	-0.8
7	Slovenia	-12.1	-0.8	Thailand	-26.2	-0.9	B&H	-35.1	-0.8
8	Hungary	-12.1	-0.8	Czechia	-26.2	-0.9	Slovakia	-34.2	-0.8
9	Belarus	-12.1	-0.8	Ukraine	-26.0	-0.9	Croatia	-33.9	-0.8
10	Croatia	-12.0	-0.8	B&H	-25.7	-0.9	Slovenia	-33.3	-0.7
11	Poland	-11.3	-0.8	Romania	-25.7	-0.9	Romania	-32.6	-0.7
12	Moldova	-11.0	-0.7	China	-25.2	-0.8	Czechia	-32.6	-0.7
13	Singapore	-10.3	-0.7	Croatia	-24.9	-0.8	Latvia	-32.0	-0.7
14	Slovakia	-10.0	-0.7	Slovenia	-24.2	-0.8	Thailand	-30.6	-0.7
15	Romania	-9.3	-0.6	Latvia	-22.5	-0.8	Lithuania	-29.4	-0.7
16	Estonia	-8.8	-0.6	TFYR Macedonia	-21.8	-0.7	Belarus	-29.3	-0.7
17	Czechia	-8.7	-0.6	Belarus	-19.6	-0.7	Russia	-28.7	-0.6
18	Serbia	-8.4	-0.6	Estonia	-19.4	-0.6	China	-27.9	-0.6
19	TFYR Macedonia	-6.0	-0.4	Russia	-18.4	-0.6	Estonia	-26.5	-0.6
20	Thailand	-5.9	-0.4	Lithuania	-18.2	-0.6	TFYR Macedonia	-26.4	-0.6
21	Georgia	-5.0	-0.3	Serbia	-17.8	-0.6	Serbia	-24.7	-0.5
22	Montenegro	-4.6	-0.3	Armenia	-17.1	-0.6	Montenegro	-19.0	-0.4
23	China	-3.6	-0.2	Montenegro	-15.1	-0.5	Armenia	-18.6	-0.4
24	Albania	-3.6	-0.2	Albania	-13.0	-0.4	Albania	-16.2	-0.4
25	Armenia	-1.9	-0.1	Georgia	-9.2	-0.3	Georgia	-13.8	-0.3
	Total	-5.2	-0.3	Total	-24.9	-0.8	Total	-28.7	-0.6

Source: Elaboration on UN DESA data; UN DESA, 2017

**Table 9 - Second group of countries; working age population; total and yearly percentage change; 2015-30, 2030-60, and 2015-60**

		2015-30			2030-60			2015-60	
		Total	Yearly		Total	Yearly		Total	Yearly
1	Bhutan	21.0	1.4	United Arab Emirates	-57.1	-1.9	United Arab Emirates	-55.3	-1.2
2	Saudi Arabia	19.5	1.3	Qatar	-55.3	-1.8	Qatar	-53.0	-1.2
3	Maldives	18.2	1.2	Bahrain	-29.0	-1.0	Bahrain	-21.0	-0.5
4	Oman	17.2	1.1	Kuwait	-25.6	-0.9	Kuwait	-18.0	-0.4
5	Malaysia	15.2	1.0	Oman	-21.1	-0.7	Oman	-7.6	-0.2
6	Lebanon	15.2	1.0	Iran	-17.9	-0.6	Iran	-6.1	-0.1
7	Iran	14.4	1.0	Maldives	-14.9	-0.5	Azerbaijan	-1.8	0.0
8	Brunei Darussalam	12.5	0.8	Brunei Darussalam	-10.3	-0.3	Maldives	0.5	0.0
9	Bahrain	11.3	0.8	Azerbaijan	-7.6	-0.3	Brunei Darussalam	0.8	0.0
10	Kuwait	10.1	0.7	Vietnam	-5.0	-0.2	Vietnam	3.7	0.1
11	Vietnam	9.2	0.6	Bhutan	-4.6	-0.2	Lebanon	13.5	0.3
12	Azerbaijan	6.2	0.4	Saudi Arabia	-3.6	-0.1	Malaysia	15.2	0.3
13	Qatar	5.1	0.3	Lebanon	-1.4	0.0	Saudi Arabia	15.2	0.3
14	United Arab Emirates	4.1	0.3	Malaysia	0.0	0.0	Bhutan	15.5	0.3
	Total	12.5	0.8	Total	-11.3	-0.4	Total	-0.2	0.0

Source: Elaboration on UN DESA data; UN DESA, 2017

The growth of the WAP of the third group of countries is quite impressive with an average yearly value of 1.6% in the first period and 0.6% in the second (Table 10). Even more impressive are some of the national values. In the first period the average yearly rate of growth of WAP is expected to exceed 4% in two countries, 3% in four, and 2% in six. The decline of the average yearly growth of total WAP from the first to the second period is shared by all the countries of the group. However, also in the second period, two countries, Timor Leste and Iraq, will register a yearly rate of growth above 3%, two above 2%, and 9 above 1%.



**Table 10 - Third group of countries; working age population; total and yearly percentage change; 2015-30, 2030-60, and 2015-60**

Range, 2015-30, 2030-60, and 2015-60											
		2015-30				2030-60				2015-60	
		Total	Yearly			Total	Yearly			Total	Yearly
1	Timor	65.7	4.4	Timor	115.0	3.8	Timor	256.1	5.7		
2	Afghanistan	65.6	4.4	Iraq	92.5	3.1	Iraq	199.6	4.4		
3	State of Palestine	56.1	3.7	State of Palestine	78.9	2.6	Afghanistan	181.2	4.0		
4	Iraq	55.7	3.7	Afghanistan	69.7	2.3	State of Palestine	179.4	4.0		
5	Yemen	53.8	3.6	Yemen	57.8	1.9	Yemen	142.7	3.2		
6	Syria	46.8	3.1	Tajikistan	52.6	1.8	Tajikistan	111.2	2.5		
7	Jordan	43.8	2.9	Jordan	44.9	1.5	Jordan	108.3	2.4		
8	Tajikistan	38.4	2.6	Egypt	43.8	1.5	Syria	107.3	2.4		
9	Pakistan	38.3	2.6	Pakistan	43.1	1.4	Pakistan	97.9	2.2		
10	Laos	34.9	2.3	Syria	41.2	1.4	Egypt	91.5	2.0		
11	Egypt	33.1	2.2	Kyrgyzstan	33.8	1.1	Philippines	71.8	1.6		
12	Nepal	32.5	2.2	Philippines	33.8	1.1	Laos	68.5	1.5		
13	Cambodia	28.5	1.9	Israel	31.8	1.1	Kyrgyzstan	67.1	1.5		
14	Philippines	28.4	1.9	Cambodia	25.2	0.8	Cambodia	60.9	1.4		
15	Bangladesh	26.6	1.8	Laos	24.9	0.8	Israel	60.4	1.3		
16	Kyrgyzstan	24.8	1.7	Turkmenistan	23.4	0.8	Nepal	54.2	1.2		
17	Turkmenistan	23.6	1.6	Mongolia	17.3	0.6	Turkmenistan	52.5	1.2		
18	Israel	21.7	1.4	Nepal	16.3	0.5	Mongolia	41.3	0.9		
19	Mongolia	20.4	1.4	Kazakhstan	14.7	0.5	Bangladesh	31.6	0.7		
20	India	20.2	1.3	India	8.7	0.3	India	30.6	0.7		
21	Uzbekistan	20.0	1.3	Uzbekistan	7.8	0.3	Uzbekistan	29.4	0.7		
22	Indonesia	17.8	1.2	Indonesia	7.6	0.3	Kazakhstan	28.4	0.6		
23	Myanmar	16.4	1.1	Myanmar	4.0	0.1	Indonesia	26.7	0.6		
24	Turkey	15.3	1.0	Bangladesh	3.9	0.1	Myanmar	21.1	0.5		
25	Kazakhstan	11.9	0.8	Sri Lanka	2.2	0.1	Turkey	15.7	0.3		
26	Sri Lanka	9.0	0.6	Turkey	0.4	0.0	Sri Lanka	11.4	0.3		
	Total	23.9	1.6	Total	16.9	0.6	Total	44.8	1.0		

Source: Elaboration on UN DESA data; UN DESA, 2017

In conclusion the BRI countries (that represent a very important share of world population) are affected by an unprecedented aging phenomenon and a growing demographic polarization.

## Labour market implications

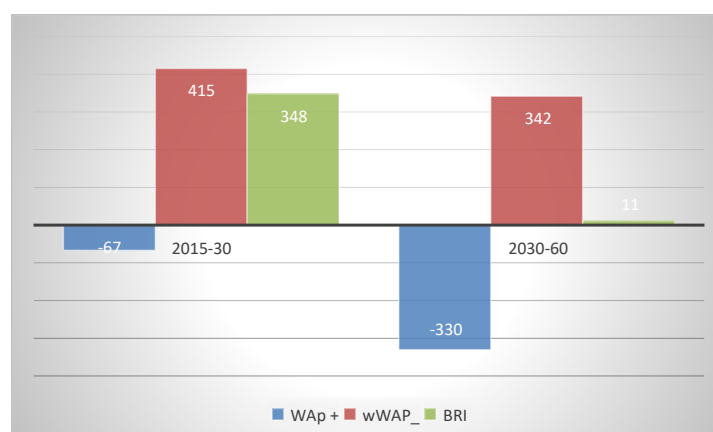
As it was previously shown and is summarized in Figure 4, between 2015 and 2030 the WAP of the BRI will increase by 348 million as the balance of a decline of 67 million in 25 member countries and an increase of 415 million in the remaining 40. Between 2030 and 2060 WAP will increase by only 11 million as a balance between a decline of 331 million in 39 countries and an increase of 342 million in the other 26 countries.

As we have already pointed out, this will be caused by the progress of the DT in the countries of the BRI that will:

- I. reduce the gap between generational entries and exits in the countries in the first phase;
- II. bring 14 countries from the second to the third phase;
- III. increase the negative gap between generational entries and exits in the countries already in the third phase.

We have also seen that the national situations are extremely diversified since BRI countries are widely spread along the path of the DT so that the average yearly rates of change of WAP between 2015 and 2060 are included between +5.7% in Timor and -0.9% in Lithuania.

**Figure 4 - WAP increase in BRI countries at the beginning of the demographic transition, decline in BRI countries at the end of the demographic transition, and total balance; 2015-30 and 2030-2060; values in million**



Source: elaboration on UN DESA data; UN DESA 2017

This situation has far-reaching and opposite labour market implications. More specifically, a growing number of BRI countries will be affected by a situation of potential structural shortage of labour, while a decreasing number of countries will face a potential structural excess of labour<sup>9</sup>. In the first case the local labour supply will be largely insufficient with respect to the demand, while in the second the labor demand will not be sufficient to satisfy the local supply, and both situations will last for a long time. We define these situations “structural” since both the positive and negative gap between labour demand and labour supply will be such that labour market mechanisms as well as the adoption of suitable demographic, employment and labour policies can not generate a situation of equilibrium; only immigration can bring labour market equilibrium in the first group of countries, while only emigration can alleviate unemployment, social tension, and rising poverty in the second (Bruni, 2017a and 2017b).

However both mass emigration and mass immigration have very high human, social and economic costs. Therefore, both groups of countries should strive to reduce as much as possible their opposite labour market disequilibrium through demographic policies, employment policies and active labour policies (Bruni, 2014, 2016, 2017a, 2017b).

The group of countries that will be affected by a structural shortage of labour should try to increase labour supply and decrease labour demand. More specifically they should try to increase labour supply, in the short run by: i) raising labour market participation (also by optimizing the territorial distribution of WAP by providing timely information); ii) raising the legal retirement age; iii) providing training and retraining to reduce qualitative miss-matches between labour demand and supply; and in the long run by trying to raise fertility. They should also try to decrease labour demand by promoting productivity and delocalizing production.

The countries that will be affected by a structural excess of labour should try to reduce fertility and, whenever possible, choose a labour intensive development model.

The different suitability and scope of the policies we have just listed and their possible impact on the labour market have been extensively discussed in previous papers (Bruni, 2014, 2017, 2018), and it is out of the scope of this paper to analyse the extremely different situations of the 65 BRI member countries.

The more limited scope is to argue that:

<sup>9</sup> The term potential is used because both situations are the result of the interaction of the demographic and economic spheres so that we can imagine exceptional events that could prevent the very probable outcome we have suggested. We can, for instance, imagine a dramatic economic crisis that would drastically reduce labour demand or a dramatic pandemic reducing supply.

- ✓ the opposite demographic situations that will characterize the BRI countries and will create serious labour market problems and endanger the sustainability of their welfare systems could be turned into an opportunity;

and

- ✓ China could exploit its leading situation in BRI not only to its advantage, but to the advantage of all member countries by taking the initiative and promoting a rational management of the human resources of the BRI.

## Policy suggestions

We have argued that in the next 45 years if not for all, certainly for the great majority of BRI countries immigration or emigration (depending on the phase of the DT they will have reached) will not be an option but a necessity.

For what relates to China I have already stressed (Bruni, 2018) that:

***China will need foreign labour before becoming old and rich.***

The international experience shows that the presence of labour needs promotes irregular immigration flows that not only are at the origin of dramatic legal, social and economic problems, but normally ends up generating a labour supply not in line with the need of arrival countries. It can also be convincingly argued that the best way to avoid irregular immigration is by eliminating the need of foreign workers and this can be done by regular migration flows. In substance

***Regular migration is the best way to prevent irregular immigration***

It would therefore be in the interest of China and all other BRI countries affected by labour shortage to design, develop and implement a policy framework that would allow to jointly manage immigration flows with the countries characterized by an excess of labour. Such flows should maximize the potential of demand driven migrations providing arrival countries with workers endowed with the skills they need. At the same time, it will be in the interest of the countries with a structural excess of labour to reduce their labour supply in order to reduce labour market pressure, alleviate poverty and social tension<sup>10</sup>.

To reach this goal it is necessary to follow a long path that will be bristling with political and technical problems, while a series of preconditions should be met even to start the process.

The thesis presented in this and previous papers and the conclusions to which they bring do not find much consensus neither at the academic, nor at the political level. A series of reasons stand on the way. The presence of a structural disequilibrium of the labour market does not fit in the neoclassical theoretical framework in which the real wage is expected to always equate labour demand and supply. This is compounded by the lack of “social and political correctness” of this thesis. A myopic vision that foreign workers are not needed together with the xenophobic feelings of which no country is devoid make difficult to adopt a pragmatic approach aimed to provide the market with the needed supply of foreign labour.

If such rational approach to migration would prevail, then the first step should be the creation of a technical structure (for instance a Labour Market and Migration Observatory, LaMMO) in charge of jointly building labour market and demographic scenarios of labour needs by educational level for China as a whole and for all its provinces. This would require:

- ✓ To build a data base with the necessary demographic, labour market and economic data;

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<sup>10</sup> For a similar argument for the Mediterranean region see Bruni, 2017a and 201b and for the ASEAN countries Bruni 2012a.

- ✓ To perfect the methodology: i) to analyse labour market flows and skill needs by educational level and ii) to jointly build demographic and labour market scenarios by educational level (Bruni, 2017b);
- ✓ To produce an analysis of demographic and labour market trends of the Chinese labour market at the provincial level (Bruni and Tabacchi, 2011);
- ✓ To build demographic and labour market scenarios of labour needs by educational level for all the provinces of China and for China as a whole;
- ✓ To produce a report pointing out the relative role that internal and international migration should play and suggest the demographic, economic, social and educational policies to be adopted to reduce the need of foreign labour.

The presentation of the report should represent the occasion for a high level discussion of the migration issue aimed to validate the methodology adopted and the empirical evidences collected by the LaMMO. If the results will find academic approval and political support, then a second international phase could begin.

China could invite representatives of BRI countries and present the idea of jointly managing migration flows coherently with the different needs of the BRI countries.

If a political agreement would be reached, then a technical phase could start aimed to produce an international setup of the Observatory with the participation of experts of interested countries and the support of their statistical offices. While the Observatory would produce scenarios of shortages and excesses of labour by educational level, the interested countries could design and implement the procedures to manage migrations flows and organize the training, placement and social integration of migrants.

A fundamental point is that the scenarios should allow to define the training activities to be carried on in departure countries to allow migrants to arrive with the skills needed by arrival countries. Such training activities should be financed by arrival countries that will then enjoy the human capital of the migrants (Bruni, 2012b, 2017a).

The joint management of migration flows will benefit both arrival and departure countries (Bruni, 2017a). The firsts would be able to have the workers with the skills necessary to continue on the path of economic growth and social development. Regular immigration will also represent the best defense against irregular migration. Departure countries will benefit by a reduction of the excess supply and the consequent alleviation of poverty, while training activities and the possibility to properly exploit the remittances sent by migrants could represent a key element in promoting economic and social development in the countries affected by a structural excess of labour.

## Conclusions

The demographic transition is causing a worldwide transformation of the population age structure. While ageing has attracted a lot of attention from scholars and politicians worried of the financial sustainability of the welfare systems, much less attention has been paid to another even more relevant effect of the DT: the demographic polarization of the planet into two groups of countries. The first will include a growing number of developed and developing countries whose working age population will dramatically decline; the second a declining number of countries, the poorest and more densely populated, whose working age population will explode.

The BRI countries that represent a very important share of the world population are affected by the same trends: an unprecedented aging phenomenon and a growing demographic polarization.

The paper has suggested that the negative impact of the demographic transition -that will cause a shortage of the workers needed to pay the pensions of the elderly and more generally sustain the welfare system- can find in the polarization process its solution. The structural shortage of

labour of the countries in the first group can in fact be satisfied by the unlimited supply of labour that will be present in the countries of the second group.

In substance developed countries should try to continue on their path of economic growth and development while adopting a rational attitude toward migration. This would imply to correctly estimate their needs of foreign human resources, contribute to their education and training both financially and with technical support, manage migration flows in strict cooperation with departure countries, carefully attend to the integration of migrants workers into their societies and labour markets.

In the next 40 years, China will be the country affected by the greatest shortage of labour. In the past China has shown to be able to implement difficult and unpopular demographic policies once convinced of their necessity, even when it meant to totally reverse the positions previously held. This was the case with the one child policy whose adoption was based on new empirical evidence. This could be the case in the new and unexpected demographic scenario we have previously outlined.

Given its leading role in the BRI, its robust economic and political ties with African and Latin American countries, and its commitment to promote international cooperation, China could take the lead and provide a strong and committed leadership to build a cooperation framework to manage international migration flows between the countries of the BRI.

Such a bold move would not only allow China to continue along its path of economic and social development, but prove its willingness to assume international responsibilities in an area in which western countries are showing a total lack of rationality, and egotistic attitudes that will be very soon proved to be in contrast with the interest of their citizens.

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