

## GLOBAL MOVEMENT OF LABOR

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## Summary

Migration is as old as human history, but its impact on social, economic, and political aspects of life is ever changing, dependent on many other developments. In the globalized economy of the twenty-first century, four types of migration are of particular significance: internal migration, international migration, forced migration, and, arguably the most significant trend, regional migration. The United Nations has undertaken many discussions on the subject of migration, linking the phenomenon to issues such as development, urbanization, and poverty. Scholars have put forward a number of theories providing the potential to understand some aspects of migration, although none can clarify the total impact of such a broad subject. Many of the theories try to explain different elements involved in the migration process, affecting states (of origin and destination), individuals (migrants and nonmigrants), and communities (“back home” and those “hosting” migrants) alike. Some of these themes are family unity, the transfer of economic goods through the payment of remittances, integration, assimilation, racism and xenophobia, naturalization, political participation, education, and employment. Controlling entry, managing borders, and combating both undocumented and human smuggling have become major preoccupations of governments in the West in particular, but also in regions experiencing large migrations in times of economic turmoil, such as Asia. Government restrictions on migration are often playing to a segment in public opinion, but not necessarily dealing with the realities, both of the economic need for new laborers and the human desire, sometimes need, to migrate.

## 1. Introduction

Humans have, throughout history, been mobile. People have always left their places of birth and residence to seek safety, survival, or opportunities elsewhere. For much of history there was little formal regulation of this migration. In the twentieth century the regulation of the movement of people across international borders became normal practice. Different states have, at different times, created different regulations, with different purposes. For some, immigration was a necessary factor for the development, economic growth, and prosperity of their country. For others, emigration was regulated or banned. States have sometimes come to see immigration as an unwanted or unnecessary phenomenon. However, regardless of what states have wanted and the controls they have sought to exercise, people have continued to move. Internal migration, be it rural–rural in developing countries, urban–urban as is often the case in developed countries, or rural–urban, is a common feature in all countries of the world.

In some cases, internal migration is forced or encouraged with the aim of more even population distribution. Often, whether internal to a state or internationally oriented, migration is a means of reuniting or forming families. All in all, migration is a complex phenomenon, linked to the economic, cultural, social, and political life of states and societies, and states' relationships with each other in all of these areas.

Globalization entered a new phase in the 1990s with increased liberalization of trade in goods and services and the transition of an increasing number of states to a market economy. Whereas some argue that liberalization of trade and capital flows obviates the need for labor flows, others argue that globalization cannot be complete without liberalization of the global labor market. The full globalization of the economy would therefore include the globalization of migration: workers, like goods, services, and capital, would move freely. Indeed, in the post Second World War era increased volumes in international trade and investment have proved no substitute for flows of workers. However, the movement of workers means the movement of people, with their social, cultural, and political facets, as well as their role as economic actors. In spite of the trend towards increased trade liberalization, or perhaps precisely because of it, increasing restrictions are being implemented to prevent the free movement of workers. Restrictionism is increasing in both developed and developing countries. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) annual SOPEMI reports on *Trends in International Migration* indicate that since 1993, the number of legal arrivals in OECD states has been stabilizing, and in fact declining in some. However, the by-definition unquantifiable amount of illegal, irregular, or undocumented immigration remains a significant factor in discussions on labor migration. While the number of asylum seekers arriving in OECD states generally declined in the 1990s (except at those points in time when conflict erupted in states close to OECD countries, e.g. former Yugoslavia), the flows for family reunification and of both temporary and highly skilled workers increased. The arrival and assessment of asylum seekers, while theoretically concerned primarily with the accordance of protection to those fleeing persecution (in line with the 1951 (Geneva) Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees), or those fleeing war and violence, cannot be entirely separated from a discussion of labor migrants.

The United Nations Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, Population Division in 1993 estimated the total number of international migrants in the world, including refugees, to be more than 125 million. The world population then being 5.5 billion, just over 2% of the world's population had migrated across national borders. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that there were some 19 million refugees in 1993, not including the Palestinians, who fall under the mandate of another UN organization (UNRWA—the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East). They calculated some 2.6 million Palestinian refugees in 1992. So a stock of more than 100 million people were estimated to be non-refugee international migrants in 1993. Approximately one-half of the international migrants moved between developing countries. The developed countries reported a net intake in the late 1980s and early 1990s of some 1.4 million immigrants per year with the majority arriving from developing countries. Estimates also show that a little more than half of the international migrants were women.

Migration can be discussed in various categories which together form global labor migration, either due to the geographic scope of movement, or because they are impacted by the effects of globalization in trade and investment. Internal migration (Section 2) is often influenced by global trade and investment patterns although the migration of the individual takes place within one state. International migration (Section 3) in the simplest sense of crossing a state frontier is likewise impacted by other facets of globalization, but is also of itself geographically “global.” Forced migration (Section 4), while not strictly motivated by economic concerns on the part of the individual migrant, does produce new economic actors. UN conferences have been concerned with these issues, and a number of unused Conventions have been drafted and agreed, but not signed, over the last decades (Section 5). There are a range of themes and theoretical explanations which emerge from these broad categories of migration (described in Section 6). These in turn provide detailed background to an assessment of regional labor migration (Section 7). Much cross-border migration is regional rather than global in orientation. That is in part due to geographic proximity, historical ties, and in the last decades, the creation of regional trading blocs or partnerships. Regional migration linked to trading blocs is part of the phenomenon of global migration.

## **2. Internal Labor Migration**

A major trend in population distribution during the twentieth century was the process of urbanization. It had long been predicted that by the early years of the twenty-first century, for the first time, more than half the world's population would live in cities. Migration forms two of the four causes generally given for increased urbanization (positive population growth; rural–urban migration; international migration; and extension of urban boundaries). Urbanization will be dealt with here only in relation to the migration policies which result from the perception of it either as a problem, or as a developmental benefit to states, and not as an issue in itself.

Urbanization is more widespread, proportionally speaking, in developed countries, but ever increasing in developing states. Urbanization in Africa is, since the 1990s, increasing four times faster than in other areas of the developing world. In Asia the growth of cities has been a relatively slower process. In Latin America, urbanization in the twentieth century was more pronounced than in Europe or North America, but slower than in both Africa and Asia.

In developing countries, in particular, rural fertility rates are generally higher than urban fertility rates, and so the pool of potential rural–urban migrants is consistently large. Those moving from the country to the city do so not only because of the employment prospects but also in search of educational opportunities, which often in turn lead to people remaining in the city, or migrating from one city to another. Rural–urban migration has consequences for the rural area as well as the urban centers. Regional disparities increase, and the cycle of poverty in rural areas is sometimes exacerbated by population depletion. Furthermore, government policies towards domestic development often become more focused on inner-city areas and the unemployment there, with all its social and political consequences. Rural employment in developing countries often remains of a subsistence nature whereas the move to the city entails a move to waged labor in production work.

Much international labor migration is also focused on urban areas. Clusters of immigrant populations from various national and ethnic backgrounds form more easily and less obtrusively in cities. In part because of the social and cultural changes, and challenges which such concentrations of non-national populations are perceived to bring, many governments in developed countries attempt to locate asylum seekers outside of major urban centers. Nonetheless, once an element of choice comes into the location of residence and employment, many accepted refugees return to major cities. Illegal labor immigration to developed countries is also largely concentrated on urban areas, except in those instances where (black market) labor opportunities are more accessible in agriculture, for example. Many irregular or undocumented immigrants find support from networks of legally resident immigrants of their own nationality already present in major cities.

### **3. International Labor Migration**

Since the 1960s, the main countries of immigration for permanent settlement have been the US, Canada, and Australia. Immigration to the US has continued to rise from 1965 to the present day, but that to both Canada and Australia has decreased steadily. In spite of a small rise during the late 1980s, admissions to Australia and Canada in 1985–1989 were below the levels recorded in both countries twenty years previously. Immigration to Canada continued to decline in the 1990s. While immigration to Australia dropped between 1992 and 1994, it started to increase again in 1995 and 1996, although not to the levels seen in the early 1990s. The largest groups of immigrants by region of origin to these three countries have been European. In 1965–1969, 33% of immigrants to the US were from Europe. By 1985–1989, that figure was 10%, while 42% of immigrants to the US originated in Latin America. In 1985–1989, European immigration to Canada formed 24% of admissions; to Australia, 31%. Asian migration to the three main receiving countries increased from 1965 to 1989. In all cases, proximity and historical ties clearly have roles to play in distribution: only 6% of permanent immigration to Australia in 1985–1989 was from Latin America. From the 1960s onwards South–North migration began to develop strongly and, until the mid-1970s was actively encouraged and allowed to grow. Since then, in spite of anti-immigration policies in many developed states, South–North migration has continued to increase proportionally to intra-developed country migration.

International migration to the European Union (EU) is less often considered to be for permanent settlement at the outset. Figures for immigration to the EU member states are inherently unclear. Varied definitions of “foreign-born” and varying citizenship regulations make many of the statistics incomparable. Furthermore, the distinctions between refugee immigration and economic or labor immigration are blurred by policies which inspire many non-refugees to request asylum. It is also often unclear whether asylum seekers without a residence status as such are included in each country’s figures on foreign-born population. Proportionally to its population, Luxembourg has the highest inflow in the EU: from 1981 to 1995 immigrants comprised between 2.0 and 2.5% of population in Luxembourg. In Germany, the figure between 0.5 and 1.5%, in the Netherlands and Denmark around 1.0%, and in France and the United Kingdom around 0.1%.

In the early 1990s, a new predominance or increase of migrants of certain nationalities was noted. Immigrant arrivals from Asian states in OECD countries was important: those from the Philippines and China in the US, Japan, and Canada; from India, Pakistan, and Vietnam in the US, UK, and Canada. For Germany, Austria, and Sweden, East–West flows played a greater role, particularly in the form of migrants from Poland and former Yugoslav states. In recent years northern Africa and western Asia have accounted for the largest share of net migration to Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium. In 1995 for the first time the former Soviet Union countries were the second largest source of migrants to the US. These new trends in countries of origin were one of three features noted by the OECD. A second feature was the confirmation of traditional countries of origin. In France, arrivals from North Africa remained the most important group. In the UK, those from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh remained at the top of the list, while former Yugoslavs were the major group in Switzerland. Migration from the US was third on the list of the UK and Japan and fourth for France. A third trend was the reduction of flows from Europe to the traditional immigration countries: Australia, US, and Canada.

Among temporary workers admitted to OECD countries are four main categories: (highly) skilled workers, seasonal workers, trainees, and students. The legislation regarding temporary worker immigration differs greatly from one developed country to another, although all claim the principle of accepting temporary labor immigration to be a positive one, in the light of economic needs. Temporary worker programs and business visas are the backbone of policies in the US, Canada, and Australia. In many European states, e.g. Germany, France, and Switzerland, the emphasis lies rather on shorter-term seasonal work (for up to three months). Migration of skilled workers between OECD countries increased in the 1980s and 1990s. Highly skilled workers are a heterogeneous group. In the US, they made up some 80% of temporary immigrant workers (not including intra-company transfers); in Canada and the UK, some 40%, and in the Netherlands, Australia, and France between 15 and 30%.

#### **4. Forced Migration**

While the literature on migration generally seeks to separate forced migration from labor migration, as do the law and policies of governments in most developed states and UN conference discussions, in practice the two are less easily separable. Forced migrants inevitably become economic actors, either as they join the workforce at some point during their period of exile or as dependents on their host state. If asylum seekers remain out of the labor market, with no right to work during the processing of their claim as is the case in many developed states, their reinsertion becomes difficult whether they remain in the host state or return to the country of origin. Skills are lost, and many refugees, who in fact have a high standard of education, finally find employment in situations well below their level of qualification. The fact that qualifications are not internationally standardized or recognized fuels this use of overqualified labor.

Asylum seekers are sometimes fleeing persecution which in part takes the form of discrimination on the job market in their country of origin on the basis of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a social group (the grounds

upon which Convention refugee status is granted). A further link between the seemingly distinct categories of migrants is the way in which, other admission channels having been fully restricted, some people have to apply for asylum in order to have any chance of being granted a legal status. This is most particularly the case in the EU states.

## **5. UN Conferences and Plans on Migration**

The United Nations has seen the discussion of international labor migration as a subtheme at a number of special conferences, including the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing, the Conference on Environment and Development, in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, and most notably three conferences on Population and Development, in Bucharest (1974), Mexico City (1984), and Cairo (1994). The development of international instruments dealing with state practices with regard to migration and migrant workers has, however, been a slow and relatively unproductive process.

Convention No. 97, revised in 1949, was at the time of the Bucharest meeting in 1974 the only international legal instrument dealing exclusively with migrant workers. It was limited in scope, seeking to ban inequalities of treatment between migrants and nationals in the exercise of employment practices, and relating only to documented workers. By 1974, it had been ratified by only 30 countries. The World Population Plan of Action, coming out of the World Population Conference in Bucharest (1974), emphasized that international migration policies should be grounded on the economic and social needs of both sending and receiving states, thus placing migration clearly in the context of socioeconomic development. By the time of the 1984 International Conference on Population, in Mexico City, the volume, direction, and characteristics of international migration flows had changed significantly. There was more temporary migration flow than settlement migration (which had steadied). Meanwhile illegal or undocumented migration was rising as European states and West Asian states limited recruitment of migrant workers following the oil crisis of 1973 and widespread economic stagnation. Refugee movements had increased significantly.

The 1984 conference emphasized the need to see three categories of migration flow as separate: documented, undocumented, and forced migrants. Government policies towards migration became seen as an integral part of the interrelated causes giving rise to certain types of migration flows and conditioning the impact of those flows. There were, however, no significant recommendations altering the management of migration. The conference appealed to governments to provide proper treatment and welfare services to documented migrants, combat prejudice and encourage family reunification, as well as to respect the basic human rights of undocumented migrants and strive to combat illegal migration. It also made reference to the 1975 International Labor Organization Convention (143) concerning Migrations in Abusive Conditions and the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Migrant Workers. This was a first international level attempt to secure certain rights for illegal or undocumented workers and combat clandestine migration and employment.

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo and the Program of Action which it adopted added a new dimension to the population

debate, which also linked migration to sustainable development. A balance between population, sustained economic growth, and sustainable development became the mantra of the Cairo Conference. International migration was one of those areas of which this holistic approach demanded a reexamination. The late 1980s and early 1990s had seen significant further changes to the composition and practice of international migration.

The end of the Cold War meant citizens of the eastern bloc were able to migrate freely from their countries for the first time in decades. The political, economic, and social changes there were leading not only to some outward migration (which was not as significant as many in Western Europe had feared) but also to inward and transit migration. The dissolution of former Yugoslavia led to massive forced migration within Europe, while the Gulf War of 1991 and the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 were examples of further migratory pressures, not directly, if at all, associated with the seeking of employment. At the same time, economic downturn and rising unemployment in more traditional migrant-receiving developed states was leading to an increase in the barriers set up against immigration.

The Cairo Program of Action saw the reemphasizing of family reunification. It also saw countries committing to emphasizing that while migration can make a positive contribution to development, remaining in one's country of origin must be a viable option for everyone. States were also invited to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1990.

Establishing for the first time different categories of migrant workers and representing a major step in formalizing the responsibilities of receiving states in upholding migrants' rights and their protection, this Convention remains unratified by most states, and thus not in force. Furthermore, a range of new and emerging issues were identified, including: the possible negative impact of short-term migration on working conditions in host countries; migration pressures as a consequence of climatic change; the protection of migrant women and children from the abuse of their sponsors; the right of receiving countries to regulate access to their territory; the adverse social and economic consequences of forced migration; problems of rejected asylum seekers and sudden mass influxes of refugees; and trafficking in women and children for prostitution and coercive adoption.

## **6. Themes and Theories**

A number of common themes have emerged in the above sections. These will be summarized here, with the aim of facilitating a more detailed description of regional labor migration. Regional labor migration is the primary form which migration takes for the economic purposes of both states and individuals in the globalizing world of the early twenty-first century. A lament of most scholars of, and practitioners concerned with, global migration is the lack of clear and consistent theories. Those that have been developed will be set out here, but they all have severe flaws and are faced with so many exceptions to the theoretical rule that their value as explanatory or predictive tools is very limited.



## 6.1. Push and Pull

One theory used to describe international migration is that which sees migrants essentially as factors of production, and attributes their movement to a combination of push and pull factors. This theory was originally developed and expounded in connection with internal migration. In that context it serves its explanatory purpose well. Labor generally moves to where it is in demand, except where such movement might be discouraged or preempted by the generous payment of welfare benefits during even a sustained period of unemployment. In the international setting, however, it often appears that much more is at issue.

An example of this comes from the OECD countries. They have undergone an “up and down” economic ride between 1980 and the late 1990s. First there was a period of sustained economic growth, during which unemployment nonetheless remained high in many countries. Then there was a period of economic decline, in the early 1990s, with significant increases in unemployment. The situation improved after the mid-1990s, with unemployment dropping in several countries towards the end of the decade. Labor immigration to OECD countries did not, however, follow this pattern: the strength and weakness of the “pull” factors at various stages did not appear to impact the volume of migration. Instead, immigration flows were characterized by a widespread acceleration in entries in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with a leveling off in the mid-1990s. With family reunification being a major trend, and more immigrants of working age entering for that reason, many OECD states saw an increase over those two decades in the number of foreign-born adults in the workforce. Measurements of foreign-born workforce are impacted not only by immigration, but also by participation rates and naturalizations, for example. In general, foreigners are perceived to be more vulnerable to unemployment than nationals, although that is less the case in settlement countries (Canada, Australia, and the US). Both the generally lower standard of educational achievement among first- and second-generation immigrants and discrimination are held to be causes of their greater vulnerability in the labor market. Whether a non-national is foreign-born or of a noncitizen generation born in the country to which his or her parents migrated does not appear to influence vulnerability in the context of employment.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

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