

Introduction to Migration

What is Migration?

International migration is the movement of individuals and people from one country or region to another. It can be voluntarily chosen to search for new and better opportunities, or forced to escape negative or dangerous situations. It has always been integral to the human condition and the patterns of movement reflect an ever-changing world.

Who migrates and where? Numbers and flows

According to the United Nations, by 2005 around 191 million people lived outside the country of their birth, or 3% of the world population. They had moved as follows:

- 62 million from poor to rich countries
- 61 million from poor to poor countries
- 53 million from rich to rich countries
- 14 million from rich to poor countries

How many migrants live in receiving countries, in 2005¹?

- 64 million live in Europe representing 8,8% of the European population
- 53 million live in Asia representing the 1,4% of the Asian population
- 45 million live in United States representing 13,5% of the American population

Why do people migrate?

People have different motives for migrating such as²:

- **economic reasons** (to find work, escape famine, etc.)
- **social reasons** (for a better quality of life or to be closer to family or friends)
- **political reasons** (to escape cultural/political/religious persecution or war)
- **environmental reasons** (natural disasters such as flooding, drought)

The migration dynamic reflects the interplay of push factors (which make the people leave their home) and pull factors (which make people move to a particular area). Here are some examples:

Push factors:

Lack of jobs and services; poor safety or security; high crime levels; famine; drought; flooding; poverty; war; political or religious persecution.

Pull factors:

More jobs and services; better quality of life; low crime levels; good food supplies; better climate and fertile land; less risk of natural hazard; wealth; political security.



How do people migrate³?

- **Nearness and colonial history.** Some migrants cross to the nearest country and if the distance is short they can commute. For longer distance migration, people often move along colonial paths towards ex-colonial powers, drawn by the language and a good knowledge of the culture.
- **Networks and family.** The choice of destination is often influenced by the existence of a network of contacts. This network is often provided by family members, since many receiving countries give priority to close relatives of existing residents.

¹. According to United Nations Data on 2005: www.unpopulation.org.

². As reported by BBC Population and Resources.

³. As reported by the Stalker's Guide to International Migration.

• **Labour brokers.** Labour brokers (or recruitment agencies) are intermediaries that match the *demand for jobs in the country of origin with the supply* in the country of destination.

Charges for finding a job are supposed to be regulated, but they are often very expensive for migrants. It usually takes three to twenty months salary for a migrant to enter a country and find work. Furthermore, the work often turns out to be very different from what was promised (e.g. lower position, smaller income, more work hours, unsafe conditions, etc.)

• **Smugglers and Traffickers.** Smugglers are like travel agents acting in an illegal manner (e.g. supplying false passports or bribing immigration officials). The difference between people being smuggled and people being trafficked is that the former choose to move, while the latter are either forced or deceived (e.g.: when young women and girls are offered to work abroad in legitimate work and are then forced into prostitution).

Facts and Fiction: The truth about migration and the economy

• The presence of migrants in the receiving countries is boosting or keeping healthy many economies and is tackling the pension crisis and population global ageing⁴.

• Migrants fill the gaps in the workforce doing the 3D jobs (difficult, dangerous and dirty) and/or low-paid jobs.

• Migrants use up 87 per cent of their salary in the host country, either in taxes or in spending for everyday living. For example, new demand for housing generated by immigrants was decisive in sustaining the construction industry boom in Spain⁵

• During a period of economic stagnation migrants are often the first to bear the brunt of redundancies as they often work in the least stable jobs, such as temporary, flexible or part-time jobs.

• In rich receiving countries, migrant workers as taxpayers make a net contribution to the government budget and have access to welfare services. However, they are less likely than nationals to claim welfare since many of them want to earn as much as possible (and therefore prefer to work than claim benefits) in order to return to their country of origin.

• On the contrary, undocumented migrants do not pay taxes and have no access to welfare services, except for the essentials (such as urgent medical care). Furthermore, they usually avoid welfare services because they fear the authorities.

• Migrants send about 13% of their earnings home in the form of "remittances". Remittances in 2006⁶ counted for about US\$ 200 billion. Informal remittances add another 50% to the total of formal remittances. The full amount from remittances is more than twice the official aid received by developing countries (107%)⁷.

• Emigration can come at a price for the countries that have invested heavily in education of their most valuable people (such as doctors, engineers). This phenomenon is called "brain drain". Moderate "brain drain" of between 5 and 10% of the skilled population has more positive than negative effects on the countries of origin⁸. In most countries, skilled emigration is situated within this bracket. But the loss of qualified people surpasses 80% in small countries like Guyana, Suriname and Jamaica, among others. The situation is also alarming in sub-Sahara Africa and in Central America. Countries like Mozambique, Uganda or Ghana lose almost half of their base of highly qualified labourers⁹.

• Today the GCIM¹⁰ promotes the notion of "brain circulation", in which migrants return to their own country, sharing the benefits of the skills and resources they have acquired abroad¹¹

Key vocabulary:

Regular or documented: are people "authorized to enter, to stay and to engage in a remunerated activity in the State of employment" (Article 5 of the UN Migrant Workers Convention).

Irregular or undocumented: people entering and living in the country of employment without such authorization. It is the correct legal description for migrants in such situations.

Illegal or Clandestine: often used to describe migrants to mean irregular or undocumented migrants, though there is now a general consensus that expressions such as "illegal" or "aliens" to describe a human being is inhumane and has no legal basis¹².

More information on Migration is available on:
Access the full December 18 directory of migrant organisations worldwide.

⁴. Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as reported in Migrants give UK a £50bn boost, 2006.

⁵. As reported in Dispelling the migrant myth, ILO Communication and Public Information, September 2006.

⁶. According to World bank remittances data 2007.

⁷. Migration and Development Brief 2, Remittance Trends 2006, by Sanket Mohapatra, Dilip Ratha, and Zhimei Xu of Development Prospects Group in collaboration with K. M. Vijayalakshmi of Development Data Group of the World Bank.

⁸. Brain drain in developing countries, Docquier, Lohest e Marfouk, 2007.

⁹. Report on migration of skilled workers and its effect on national development, ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, 2007.

¹⁰. The Global Commission on International Migration is an independent body composed of 19 Commissioners.

¹¹. Migration in an interconnected world: New directions for action, GCIM Report, October 2005, pg. 31.

¹². A similar example is "illegitimate children" which slowly began to disappear as legal bodies defined that a child could not, by definition, be illegitimate in the eye of the law.