

Introduction



We live in a dynamic age of global integration, where the reconnection and mixture of the world's people is challenging dominant norms and practices in many societies. Disintegration and integration are simultaneous and interwoven. Cultural codes adapt. New economies emerge. Innovation prospers. Social institutions struggle to adapt.

To many, the challenges associated with migration are characteristic of our age of postmodernism, multiculturalism, and aspiring cosmopolitanism. Some are nostalgic for an illusory past when people had more in common. While the scale, pace, and intensity of human movement may be greater today, the habits of migration and its disruptive effects are as old as humanity itself. Outsiders have always encountered opposition from their adoptive societies. Nevertheless, the direction of history points to the persistent expansion in the boundaries of community. Our cultural and political frontiers have gradually receded.

In most parts of the world, the old distinctions between clans and tribes are now of less significance than are national boundaries. Whereas at one time a "migrant" may have been one who married into a neighboring village, "migration" now generally refers to moving across a national border, often with the purpose of settling for a period of time. The names "immigrant" and "asylum seeker" have acquired negative connotations in many societies, echoing the ancient fear of the "barbarian." Our governments and societies retain an antiquated suspicion of outsiders, who were born in one nation-state and seek to make their life in another one. The result is a conventional view that a high rate of international migration should be prevented.

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In the current period, “migration” is defined as cross-border movement, and it has come to be seen as something to be managed—a cost to be minimized rather than an opportunity to be embraced. Our view is that it is a key driver of human and economic development and that our future will be strongly influenced by policies regarding migration.

How governments craft and coordinate migration policy will determine whether our collective future is defined by a more open and cosmopolitan global society or one that is unequal, partitioned, and less prosperous. This book aspires to set contemporary debates about policy within a wider context. Public debates about migration are limited by a lack of perspective of its historical role, contemporary impacts, and future prospects. This book aims to address these gaps and to contribute to advancing the discourse about the role of migrants and migration in world development.

We seek to shift discussion on international mobility away from narrow national-level immigration debates, toward a more global view of migration. The terms “immigration” and “immigrant” can obscure more than they reveal, because they imply that people move once, permanently—from outside the country to inside—when migration for the most part is temporary, repeated, or circular. This perspective also ignores the dynamism of human movement: countries that accept large numbers of migrants also typically send similarly large numbers across their borders. Migrants are uncommon people, and they often move several times in search of opportunity and safety. Viewing cross-border movement simply in terms of immigration limits a broader appreciation of how networks and economies function in an increasingly integrated world.

In this book, we question the received wisdom that an increase in the flow of international migrants is undesirable. We offer fresh insights into the past, present, and future role of migration. We begin by reviewing the historical role of migrants and migration in advancing human progress and world development. Second, we analyze the contemporary period of managed migration. Drawing upon a rapidly growing field of multidisciplinary scholarship on the dynamics, flows, and impacts of migration, we make the case that current ad hoc regulations are poorly suited for a world economy that thrives on openness, diversity, innovation, and exchange. Last, we look to the future, presenting projections of

demographic, environmental, and social trends that highlight how the number and diversity of migrants will grow over the next fifty years.

PART I: PAST

Throughout history, as remains the case today, people have moved under conditions that are not typically of their own choosing. Even those under the most restrained and difficult circumstances have navigated new social and cultural settings with determination and ingenuity. By adapting, innovating, and combining knowledge across cultural barriers, migrants have advanced the frontier of development since humans departed from Africa, some 50,000–60,000 years ago. The emergence of early civilizations around 4000 BCE drew people from scattered settlements into dense patterns of complex social life. The first civilizations, like social magnets, brought people from the hinterlands into the life of the cities—as labor, merchants, traders, and administrators—and propelled city-dwellers into the frontiers to find resources and trading partners.

The growth of civilizations quickened the pace of exchange and the commerce of ideas and technologies. As increasingly complex societies developed in Eurasia, traders, adventurers, missionaries, and conquering armies broke down the frontiers separating distant empires. Valuable technologies and commercial and other practices, which at times took many centuries to develop, were shared over ever-increasing distances. Migrants carried with them religious teachings, agricultural techniques, and commercial practices. The scourge of war and the lure of commerce propelled people across old frontiers, reconnecting communities from eastern China to West Africa, which had developed distinct cultures over tens of thousands of years.

The expansion of seafaring trade during the second millennium brought new levels of prosperity to China and Europe, which both saw the launch of ambitious voyages into uncharted waters to find new markets for their goods. As China suddenly terminated its explorations near the turn of the fifteenth century, Portugal was beginning to fund open-ended expeditions across the Atlantic Ocean; the coincidence of these two developments would precipitate European contact with the Americas and a seismic shift in global power. The European “Age of Discovery” (also

termed the “Age of Gunpowder Empires”)¹ between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries completed the process of reconnecting humanity. European ships were now dominating trade within the Indian Ocean and extracting resources in New World plantations. Regional mercantile trading networks became knitted into a global power structure with force and control projected across vast distances.

With the emergence of global networks and the development of a world economy, the pace of economic development began to drive migratory flows, most significantly in the form of chattel slavery. International trade and the industrial revolution fueled competition, promoting innovation and expanding production in Europe. Many people traveled across oceans or continents, some in search of a better life. Millions more, particularly from Africa, were forced to move under the tyranny of slavery or indentured labor. In this new era of globalization, free and forced migrants were the causes and consequences of economic growth.

The twentieth century has witnessed the proliferation of states and the extension of government bureaucracies into the management of migration. The introduction of passports, strict border controls, immigration quotas, guest-worker programs, and the distribution of rights on the basis of nationality are all features of the new era of highly managed migration. Passports and border controls are relatively new innovations, and their increasingly strict enforcement in the twentieth century dramatically changed the dynamics of migration. International migration became regulated at the level of the nation-state. Apart from measures to protect refugees, international cooperation has largely neglected the vital dimension of migration.

PART II: PRESENT

Despite the obstacles inherent within highly regulated national migration systems, people continue to move for many of the same reasons that have driven migrants throughout history: to seek new opportunities and to escape economic and political distress. Many factors related to family, wages, security, values, and opportunities influence migration decisions. Migration confounds simplistic analysis, as the decision to migrate is nested within relationships, networks, and structures. People frequently

move more than once, and migration has evolving social dynamics that take into account economic cycles, immigration policies, and political conditions. Despite the complexity of decisions to migrate, a number of factors associated with the most recent wave of globalization, including transportation and communication technologies, have collapsed social distances and make it easier to move than ever before.

Immigration regulations aim to manage flows to meet public policy goals. These regulations have evolved from earlier practices of using nation-based quotas to encompass a range of migration “channels.” Economic channels bring in students and highly skilled migrants, as well as low-skilled workers to meet temporary labor demands. Families and particular ancestral groups are recognized through social migration channels. Those who have been compelled to move because of civil conflict, persecution, or intense pressure move as refugees or as asylum seekers. In strictly limiting the conditions under which one may legally migrate, states spend heavily on a sprawling architecture of enforcement and control. The effectiveness of new regulatory mechanisms in meeting their objectives of controlling migrant flows remains a matter of considerable debate.

Despite the efforts of many states to halt permanent settlement by certain migrants and to distinguish “their” citizens from foreigners, the constant movement of people has continually changed the concept of what it means to be a foreigner. Multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism are now celebrated features of many societies. Yet the contribution of migrants to economic and other aspects of life is severely underestimated. As a result, the focus of governments and public opinion often is on managing the perceived threats posed by migrants, rather than assisting them to fully participate in mainstream society.

International migration pays dividends to sending countries, receiving countries, and migrants themselves. In receiving countries, it promotes innovation, boosts economic growth, and enriches social diversity, and it is a boon for public finance. Sending countries have their economies stimulated by the financial and social feedback of migrant networks. Migrants reap the welfare benefits of higher wages, better education, and improved health when they move to relatively more developed countries. High rates of migration do, however, produce costs that are carried unevenly by particular localities and countries. These costs are often

short-run, and they can be reduced through resource transfers and by building the capacity of public institutions to manage the social and administrative changes presented by higher rates of migration.

PART III: FUTURE

The forces that have propelled migration in the past are continuing to intensify, and the sheer pressure of human movement requires that more attention be paid to domestic policy and global migration governance. In the next fifty years, the supply of potential migrants will expand alongside economic growth, urbanization, and rising educational attainment in low-income countries—especially in sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia. As always, people will move to seek better opportunities, higher wages, and security, concerns that will become more salient as intercountry inequality widens and climate change threatens livelihoods. Demand for migrants will also increase dramatically in most developed countries and in many developing countries. Population decline and population aging will create new demands for labor, both skilled and less-skilled. National competitiveness is already leading countries to dismantle barriers to mobility for high-skilled workers. Migration is a vital source of dynamism in economies and will become even more important as societies age and fertility tumbles.

The twentieth century assumption that migration is a strictly national problem to be handled independently by nation-states is no longer valid. A twenty-first century approach to international migration demands that we come to terms with the social and economic forces propelling people across borders and that the instruments of governance equip countries to reap the full benefits of global mobility. Both national and international policy reform is required to achieve objectives that meet evolving national needs, as well as the aspirations of migrants themselves.

At the domestic level, public policy should reflect the understanding that migration is a social process that cannot be turned on or off. Pragmatic policy choices are needed to accommodate the new dynamics of international mobility and to draw collective benefit from the processes of migration and cross-border exchange. Important lessons can be learned from those regions that have open borders (such as within parts of the

European Union) as well as those that have tried to prevent all migration. In the light of our analysis of past and current practices, we outline the key objectives for a global migration agenda. For both ethical and economic reasons, we argue that the most desirable future scenario involves freer movement across borders. A global migration agenda ought to be framed around principles that guide pragmatic steps toward a more open global economy that serves our collective interest.

Reforming migration policy at the national level needs to be complemented by coordinated approaches to global migration governance. Migration is the orphan of the global institutional architecture. The international institutional and legal framework is silent on systemic migration issues, other than refugees. Responsibility for migration falls chaotically between several international agencies that currently have neither the mandate nor the capacity to address key global concerns regarding migration.

The twenty-first century will bring major new challenges to migration policy with demographic, economic, and environmental changes leading to fundamental shifts in the flows of migrants. The global community is becoming connected in a manner not experienced since our small-world evolutionary origins in Africa. Our ability to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century requires a better understanding of our deep migration impulse and its impact on our future.