

## The Fifth Largest Country: International Migrants

*The first step toward making migration manageable is to understand why people migrate. Most people do not want to cross national borders, and even though the number of migrants is at an all-time high, international migration is still low relative to the 97% of the world's residents who did not migrate. Furthermore, economic growth can turn emigration nations into destinations for migrants, as it did for Ireland, Italy, and Korea. The challenge is to manage migration by reducing the differences that encourage people to cross borders, while taking into account how investment, remittances, and aid can stimulate economic development and reduce migration pressures in the countries that migrants leave.<sup>1</sup>*

—Philip Martin, editor of *Migration News* and *Rural Migration News* and Gottfried Zürcher, director general of the International Center for Migration Policy Development in Vienna

People of every age, nationality, and income level leave home to look for better opportunities elsewhere. Factors that push people to migrate may include unemployment, low wages, limited social, educational, and economic opportunities, and a desire to expand their horizons. Some want to help their families financially. Others may go abroad to attend school, join family members, or escape political instability. For many, migration means a chance to get an education, earn meaningful wages, help family, and improve their overall quality of life.

Immigration patterns take many shapes and tell countless stories. Africans obtain higher education and professional employment in Europe. Eastern Europeans gravitate toward better job markets in Western Europe and Russia. Latin Americans follow educational opportunities for their children to the United States. Regardless of the policies

### Top Receiving countries (millions of immigrants):

- United States (38.4)
- European Union (18.5)
- Russia (12.1)
- Ukraine (6.8)
- Saudi Arabia (6.4)
- Canada (6.1)
- India (5.7)

implemented by receiving countries, immigration is an aspect of modern demography that is here to stay.

Leaving family and community behind to relocate legally or slip illegally into another country is never an easy decision. Often, parents immigrate to a country with higher-paying jobs, leaving children behind with grandparents or other family members. Even more common, one parent will find work overseas and subsidize the spouse and children that remain behind. Breaking up the family may be a last resort to ensuring that those in the home country can make ends meet. Children of expatriate parents often struggle emotionally with feelings of abandonment. Parents often struggle with guilt.

### Where Do Immigrants Settle?

There are 191 million people living outside their home countries—about 3% of the world population. A large number of them (61 million) migrated from one developing country to another. About the same number migrated from developing to developed countries. The remaining immigrants moved from developed to other developed countries. This lesser-discussed third group is actually the largest.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's *2007 American Community Survey*, there were 38.1 million foreign born residents



Sri Lankan Tamil refugees wait at the South India coastal border for a security check after a risky crossing at sea. Photo: Senthil, Courtesy of Photoshare

in the United States—12.6% of the total population. The Pew Hispanic Center estimates that approximately 11.9 million of foreign born residents are unauthorized to be living here—about 4% of the total population. A little less than half of them arrived legally and overstayed their visas or border crossing cards. The rest entered illegally.

After the United States, Russia is the second largest immigrant-receiving country in the world (the EU receives more immigrants than Russia but is not technically a country). It is also the second largest sending country. Ukraine is also one of the top five sending and receiving countries. And India is at the top of both lists as well. Such relationships exemplify the complexity of migration patterns.

### Remittances

Remittances are funds that immigrant workers send to their home countries, usually to their families. In 2007, global remittances were estimated by the World Bank at \$318 billion. Those to developing countries were about \$240 billion. Remittances in many small countries make up a huge percentage of GDP: examples include Tajikistan (46%), Moldova (38%) and Lebanon (24%). The countries receiving the most remittances are (in descending order) India, China, Mexico, and the Philippines. In 2007, Filipino workers sent home \$14 billion.

Often, workers return to their home countries once they have saved enough money to buy property or start a business.

### Immigration's Effect on Population

According to population projections done by the Pew Research Center, 82% of the increase in U.S. population between 2005 and 2050 will be from immigrants and their descendants. However, immigrants who die in the U.S. are counted along with the native-born deaths, artificially boosting the percentage of population growth due to immigration.

Similar trends emerge in other developed countries. In 2006-2007, immigration accounted for 56% of Australian population growth. Canada accepts about 240,000 immigrants per year, accounting

### Facts & Figures

- About 191 million people live outside their place of birth, comprising about 3% of the world's population.
- If the migrant population were a country, it would be the 5<sup>th</sup> most populous country in the world.
- Women accounted for 49.6% of global émigrés in 2005.
- Women make up 79% of recent migrants from Indonesia.
- In 2007, remittance flows were estimated to be more than \$318 billion worldwide. About \$240 billion of this went to developing countries, exceeding official development assistance.
- There are approximately 9.2 billion international refugees, the lowest number in a quarter century.

for the majority (75%) of their population growth. Fertility in Canada is low, at 1.5 children per woman.

Still, immigration does not change world population. In fact, moving to another country may enable some people to have *fewer* children, based on a higher level of access to family planning and other health services. While some countries are anxious to revise their immigration policies and tighten their borders, doing so will not change the course of global population growth.

### Women as Migrants

Men historically comprised the majority of migrants, while women who migrated were believed to do so as wives, mothers, sisters, or daughters accompanying men. Over the past few decades, though, studies have shown that women make up nearly half of all migrants, and most recently, more and more women are migrating by themselves.

### The Population Connection

High levels of immigration are signs of rapid population growth, which creates pressures leading to increased poverty, hunger, land degradation, a lack of health services, and limited social and economic

mobility. These problems motivate people to leave their homeland in search of greater opportunities elsewhere.

In societies where women have very limited opportunities and resources, birthrates and adolescent birth rates tend to be high. As a result, population growth rates are also very high. Studies have shown that when the status of women improves, birthrates go down and population growth slows. When women are educated, can hold gainful employment, and are able to make decisions about their own reproductive health, they usually choose to have fewer children and wait longer before having them.

### Solutions

All couples must have access to a wide range of contraceptives and reproductive health information, empowering them to decide the number and spacing of their own children.

The improved economic and educational opportunities that accompany population stabilization give women more avenues to a better life. Countries with significant populations of migrants (in both countries of origin and destination) should work to expand legal protections of migrant workers and foster cooperation between governments, migrants, employers, and agencies.

Migration patterns reveal a lot about how people are dealing with the effects of overpopulation, and it is important to address the issues that come along with changing trends.

Women play a central role in stabilizing population—they bear children, contribute to the economy, run households, and lead families. Whether or not a woman decides to migrate, we must make sure women can continue to do all these things—and more—healthily and safely.

<sup>1</sup> Martin, Philip and Zürcher, Gottfried, "Managing Migration: The Global Challenge" *Population Bulletin*, Vol. 63, No. 1, Population Reference Bureau, March 2008.

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*Population Connection is America's largest grassroots group advocating for progressive action to stabilize world population at a level that can be sustained by the Earth's resources.*