

International migration trends

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There are thought to be nearly 150 million international migrants as we enter the 21st century, if a migrant is taken to mean a person who resides outside of his or her country of birth or citizenship for one year or more [1]. There were an estimated 75 million in 1965, 105 million in 1985 and 120 million in 1990. But these estimates are open to question, given the difficulty of observing and quantifying international migration (see box). In particular, reliable information is lacking on flows—departures, transits, returns—leaving only that on stocks—the number of migrants resident on a given date in each country—to form an idea of migratory exchanges. Net migration flows to developed countries—arrivals less departures—are estimated to have averaged about 2.4 million people a year in the period 1990-2000, which is highly consistent with the figures for inflows to the main Northern host countries (2.7 million for OECD countries in 1998). Given that this is a net count, i.e. combining long-term departures with returns of nationals and non-nationals, it can be inferred that annual outflows, i.e. emigration, worldwide are significantly higher than the estimated 2.4 million, particularly if the significant but hard to quantify South-South migration is added.

The volume of international migration must not overshadow the fact that it involves only a tiny share of the world population (2.5% of the 6.1 billion people in 2001). The large majority are geographically stable, and the picture of a world criss-crossed by vast, never-ending waves of migrants does not reflect the reality, notwithstanding large-scale local and regional population moves chiefly as a result of conflicts, political or

environmental crises (drought in the Sahel in the 1970s, Gulf War in 1991).

◆ Population drifts: fundamental to the history of mankind

Migration is part of what has shaped humanity and most societies. Basically, mankind's impulsion throughout history to take possession of, settle on and develop land has come about through moves and migrations. Strictly-speaking, these only started to become *international* when nations—nation states, to be more precise—were formed. It was not until the 20th century that the concept came into its own on a large scale with the breakdown of the colonial empires, the redrawing of the world map and the proliferation of national borders—the number of states rose from around fifty at the turn of the 20th century to over 200 by 2001—significantly shaping and increasing this type of population shift.

History's great migrations are still a painfully sharp memory, like that of the slave trade, that "silent migration", which exiled a probable 20 million Africans to America and the Arab world, vast waves of European settlement to the open spaces of the "New World" (51 million emigrants between 1846 and 1939) and the colonial territories, making Europe a historically unprecedented place of departure, the gradual downward advance of the Chinese as from the 18th century to the South Seas, with their diaspora subsequently extending to the four corners of the world, forced displacements and exoduses caused by the 20th century's two world wars, then by the collapse of the colonial empires. Throughout the 1950s, Europe remained the world's main place of departure.

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The long-standing exceptions of France and a handful of other countries aside, almost all the European states at that time—especially Russia, the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain—had a net emigration rate. The “new lands” of North and South America, Australia and New Zealand had the greatest power of attraction. The historical roots of many of today’s migration streams are to be found here, either directly, as with emigration from Britain—still ongoing—to North America and Australia, or “reverse migration” which drains streams of migrants from the old colonial territories to the “mother country”—from the Maghreb and French-speaking Africa to France, from the Commonwealth to the United Kingdom, from the Portuguese-speaking countries to Portugal, and from the Philippines to the United States. The self-same paradigm of colonial historical and cultural ties is what is now drawing Russian-speakers of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia back to Russia, which has had a high net immigration rate since the mid-1980s.

◆ New migration patterns

One key change in world migration trends stems from what Alfred Sauvy described as “reverse migration flows” between North and South, with most flows now originating in the South. The change is not just geographical, however, but also concerns the sex- and occupation-specific composition, duration and signification of flows.

The big world migration systems now focus on the centres of globalization (North America, Western Europe, Japan) and some oil-rich Middle East countries, with regional pull-factor subsystems (around the new economic powerhouses of south-east Asia; towards the Republic of South Africa in sub-Saharan Africa) [2]. This sharp polarization of migration systems is accompanied by an expansion in areas of departure and a broadening range of flow destinations. Migration streams are diversifying and becoming globalized at the expense of traditional country-to-country linkages: so, the once-exclusive Morocco-France traffic is dwindling in favour of linkages with many different countries in western Europe and North America.

International migration is still a sex- and age-specific phenomenon, mainly concerning 20-35 year old males. But the traditionally low female share of international labour migration has risen sharply to nearly equal the male share [3]. The streams of skilled and highly-skilled labour are increasing between the most mature economies, but also between developing countries.

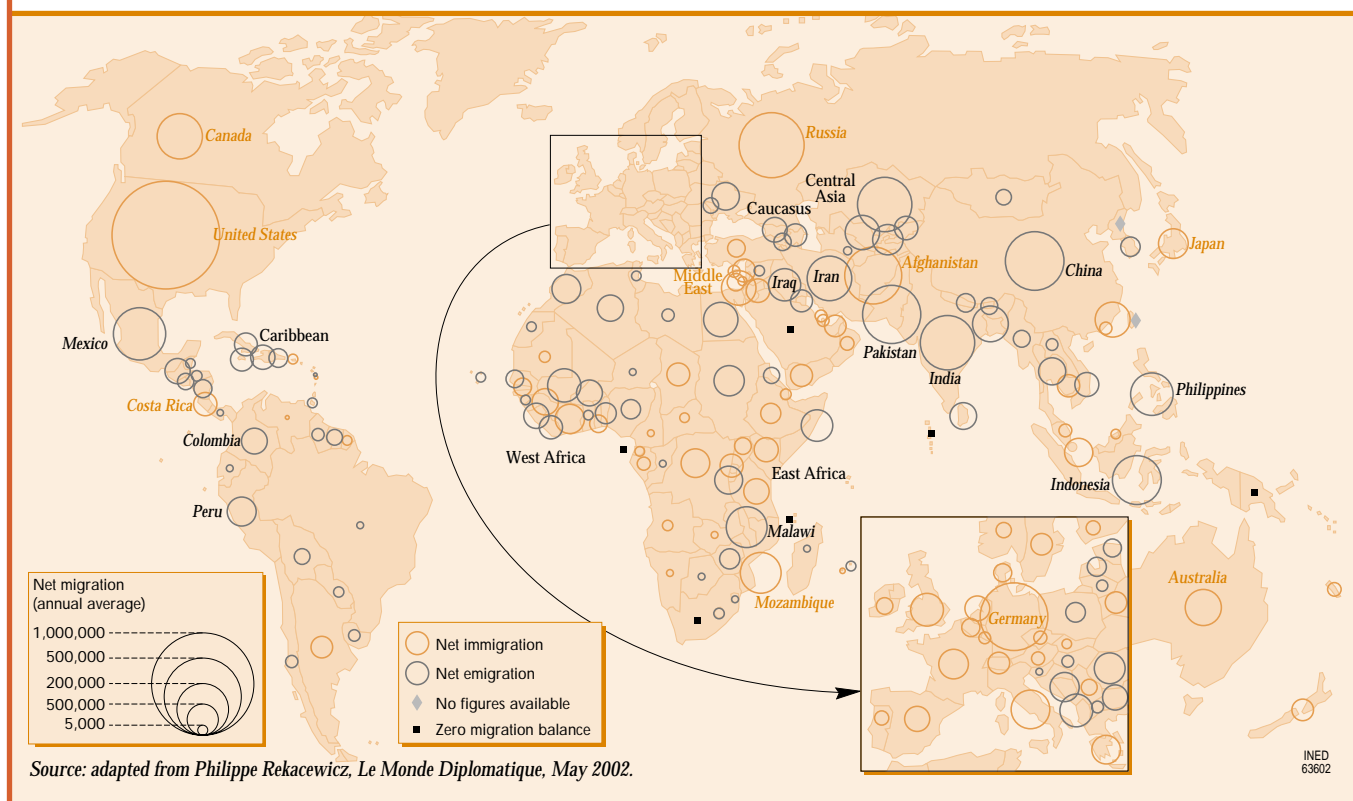
◆ Sending countries

At the dawn of the 21st century, most of the volume of international emigration clearly comes from the developing world (map). Asia is the main sending region, with its vast population growth centres of China and the Indian sub-continent (India, Pakistan) reinforced by secondary centres which are comparatively more active for their demographic load (Indonesia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka). Africa comes second: East and West Africa, North Africa (from Morocco to Egypt); followed by the Caribbean and its continental borderlands (Mexico, Central America, Colombia), with some under-representation for the other countries of mainland Latin America (except Peru). Sending countries can be roughly classified into three groups:

- *Un- and semi-skilled labour-exporting countries.* International migration seems to be a means of tackling poverty in these countries, a way of accessing dignity and education for migrants and their families. A wide range of countries are concerned: Indonesia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Mexico, Haiti, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Turkey, Yemen, Egypt, the Maghreb states, Senegal, Mali, Ghana, Lesotho, Botswana, but also Poland, Bulgaria, Romania and Albania. Some of these countries are main sources of what may be long-established diasporas (China, India), whose networks maintain and determine the direction of world flows. The qualification levels of new migrants are steadily rising with the spread of education in countries of origin and rising job skill demands in the countries of employment.
- *Brain drain countries.* The development strategies of big corporations and globalization are driving new patterns of international mobility within the world’s most advanced economies (North America, European Union, Japan, Australia, New Zealand). World flows of skilled professional labour are a growing form of international migration which is increasingly impacting developing countries (engineers and computer specialists from India and Lebanon).
- *Refugee sending countries.* The number of refugees may have fallen sharply since the end of the Cold War, but open conflicts and intolerance continue to fuel forced migration [4]. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there were between 13 and 18 million refugees in 2001 (1). Africa has been most affected over the past ten years. While things have, happily, improved and even

(1) These figures are only estimates, as UNHCR counts only people with refugee status, and not even all of these—e.g., Palestinian refugees who come under another specialized agency, UNRWA, and so are not included in UNHCR figures.

Map of net migration—arrivals less departures—in the period 1990-2000



settled down in Mozambique, South Africa and Namibia, civil peace is on a knife-edge and there are open conflicts in the high plateaux region (Burundi, Rwanda), West Africa (Liberia, Sierra Leone) and the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan). In the Caucasus—Azerbaijan and Armenia, in particular—and the Middle East, instability and recurrent crises are fuelling new streams of refugees (Kurdistan, Iraq, Afghanistan). The European Balkan states have paid a high price for the break-up of former Yugoslavia (5 million displaced persons in all, 3 million of whom sought refuge within former Yugoslavian territory, and 2 million fled to neighbouring countries, especially Germany). The recent rise in migration from Afghanistan to the EU reveals the feelings of hopelessness among long-established refugees (Palestinians, Kurds, Afghans) who leave the neighbouring first-asylum states to add to the ever-spreading sweep of international migration.

◆ Transit countries

As a result of the internationalization of migration flows and the tightening up of regulations in most host countries (the Schengen area within the European Union), the trajectories of international migration, particularly illegal immigration, have become significant-

ly longer, and transit migration has reached unprecedented levels. The old distinction between sending and receiving countries is blurring in the face of increasingly complex combinations of functions and roles. Turkey, Mexico, Malaysia, Senegal and Morocco are cases in point of multiple function countries, which combine outflows and permanent or temporary return flows with transit of non-national migrants, and where economic immigration is no bar to the temporary or final acceptance of refugees. Mexico's border with the United States, the Mediterranean straits, the Strait of Malacca between Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula, are all crossing points where these transit flows place great pressure.

◆ Host countries

Where resident populations—stocks—are concerned, the United States continues to exert its traditional attraction and is the world's principal host country, with 28 million people born outside the US in 1999 (i.e. 10% of the American population), well ahead of a second group comprising India and Pakistan (8.6 million and 7.3 million), and Germany (7.3 million). A third group hosts between 2 and 5 million non-nationals: Canada (5.0 million), Australia (4.4 million), Saudi Arabia (4.0 million), Ivory Coast (3.4 million), France

International migration, not readily measurable

The problem with measuring migration is the almost total lack of any systematic observation of such exchanges in transit and sending countries, and the non-comparability of data. Most migration statistics are compiled in the countries of arrival or settlement, in the form of estimated annual immigration volume from administrative sources (residence or work permits issued, population registers) or population enumeration by country of birth or nationality in censuses and surveys. The continuous reporting system on migration (SOPEMI) set up by the OECD in 1973 is gradually helping to harmonize the data in the organization's Member States. Other observatories are being set up elsewhere, like that in Africa, under the aegis of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The United Nations' recommended definition of an international migrant is: "a person who has changed country of usual residence". The crossing of an international border with a change of usual residence is what differentiates international from internal migration, which takes place within a country's borders. It is also important to distinguish flows (arrivals and departures within a defined interval) and stocks (point-in-time resident population). The concept of migrant (emigrant, immigrant), based on a geographical criterion (spatial moves) is not to be confused with that of foreign national, which is based on a legal criterion: a foreign national is someone who does not have the nationality of the country in which they reside, a capacity which changes with developments in national policies on the acquisition of citizenship. The inconsistency of world sources, however, may in practice lead to the two concepts being used as interchangeable.

(3.2 million), the United Kingdom (2.2 million), Hong Kong (2.2 million).

Topping the list of receiving countries with the highest net immigration over the period 1990-2000 is the United States (annual average 1.1 million), followed by Germany (359,000), Russia (320,000), Canada (141,400), Italy (116,100), Singapore (61,800) and Israel (45,400). The European Union countries all together gained 8,640,000 migrants over the period, an annual average of 864,000; France has one of the lowest net immigration rates at 55,000 a year, according to INSEE (the French National Institute of Statistics).

But when looked at by relative size of country and ratio of migrant stock to total resident population, a very different classification emerges:

– A first group of sparsely-populated, oil-rich, high-immigration countries where immigrants are sometimes in the majority. This group had the highest proportions in the world in the early 90s: United Arab Emirates (90%), Kuwait (72%), Qatar (64%), with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Brunei and Libya probably having rates ranging between 25% and 40%. Immigration is locally very large-scale here, therefore, but unpredictable because subject to sudden economic downturns or political crises, as in Nigeria in the 80s or in Iraq and Kuwait following the 1991 Gulf War.

– A second group, with a high proportion of immigrants, is made up of very small countries, usually island or peninsular micro-states as in the Caribbean and Pacific, many of which have a special tax status among other things: Monaco (67%), Macao (45%), Hong Kong pre-return to China (40%), Singapore (17%).

– The third group comprises what used to be called the "New World" countries with vast tracts of still sparsely populated land: Canada (17%) and Australia (24%). The way they have developed is very akin to the following group.

– A fourth group consists of the Western industrial democracies, where immigrant communities generally account for between 2% and 10% of the population: the United States (10%), EU countries (Austria 9.3%, Belgium 9.0%, Germany 8.9%, France 5.6% (2), Sweden 5.6%, the Netherlands 4.1%, Italy 2.2%, Spain 2.1%). With 19%, Switzerland seems to stand apart in this group, but its near-island status at the centre of the European Union puts it closer to the second group mentioned above.

– A final group cannot go unmentioned: these are the so-called "first asylum" countries receiving mass flows of refugees because of conflicts in a neighbouring country. Almost all of these receiving countries are in the developing world: Costa Rica, Iran, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Sudan, Tanzania, Guinea and Kampuchea. These countries experienced often huge departure and return migration streams during the 90s. But most are not wealthy countries. Malawi, which in the early 90s received nearly a million Mozambican refugees—equivalent to a quarter of its population—is one of the world's poorest countries.

The world migration map shows the broad historical breaks and especially the massive North-South imbalances, which embody labour market needs, the constraints of population ageing in the North and the legitimate aspirations of the underprivileged populations in the South. The media revolution is helping bring these frustrated ambitions to world notice and boost migration in a world where aspirations for a decent existence and access to culture will be increasingly central to spatial and social mobility.

(2) In France, 5.6% of the population are foreign nationals, and 7.3% were born abroad.

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