

## Mass Immigration: Causes and Solutions

Around the world millions of people have been leaving their home countries to migrate to other countries, some as refugees from warfare, violence, persecution or even climate change. Other movements simply reflect people seeking to improve their lives. In the last decade large global migrations have taken place in the Middle East and in Africa where people have moved across neighboring borders or to Europe in hopes of finding better living conditions. The United States has experienced similar mass migrations from Mexico and more recently, Central and South American countries, from people seeking asylum or opportunity. Many of these mass migrations involve hundreds and even thousands of people leaving their homelands, often walking in caravans or traveling by boat at considerable risk. They hope they will be allowed to enter a country that is safer, politically stable or offers economic opportunities.

There are also large numbers of “internal immigrants”, people who have been forced to return to their homelands or who are looking for better living conditions within their native country. Many countries have had large internal migrations, such as Great Migration in the U.S. when six million African Americans fled the Jim Crow South for better opportunities in the North during the early to middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Large migrations have taken place when warfare or violence have caused citizens of one country to cross the border into a neighboring nation to find safety or temporary refuge, as has occurred with Palestinian and Syrian refugees fleeing into Jordan, Lebanon, and other safe-haven countries. Some migrations, such as from Sub-Saharan Africa are due to extreme weather changes. In the 1950s, the United Nations created the High Commission for Refugees. Its purpose is to protect the rights and well-being of refugees around the world and to assist in their voluntary repatriation or resettlement in a third country. Today, nearly 85% of the world's refugees live in host countries neighboring the home country from which they fled, the majority of whom have left the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia.

International migrants and refugees (often referred to as the “foreign-born population”) are defined as those who have left their home countries with the desire to take up residence in another country for more than one year. In 2018, the United Nations estimated that migrants made up 3% of the world's total population (not including short-term visitors, tourists, temporary workers, or business travelers). By the end of 2017, there were more than 64.5 million displaced people who fled their home country as the result of civil wars, ethnic conflicts, widespread violence, persecutions (often considered to be refugees) and climate change. An additional 233 million people migrated for economic or life-improvement reasons such as finding work, education, health care, or to join family members who had already moved to another country. In 2017, the number of international migrants had increased by 49% from the

year 2000. Hence, global mass migrations have become a serious international problem, not just for displaced persons leaving their homelands but for countries through which these migrants and refugees travel through or in which they seek to enter and take up residence.

The volume of mass migrations over the past several years raises a number of complex national and international issues:

- Affirming and ensuring humanitarian values, relief, and protections
- Maintaining or reforming legal immigration policies
- Addressing national security concerns
- Contending with illegal immigrants and refugees
- Determining the economic viability of assimilating large non-citizen populations
- Confronting a destabilized geo-political world order
- Providing aid and basic assistance to large numbers of traveling migrants and refugees
- Addressing a resurgence in nativism and anti-immigration sentiments in some of the countries targeted by migrants and refugees as places of opportunity
- Strengthening relations with and providing aid to developing and/or unstable countries from which immigrants are leaving in mass

Those who analyze mass global migrations often make a distinction between migrants of choice and migrants of circumstance, while recognizing that many fall somewhere in between.

Mass migration should be viewed in terms of a spectrum of causes. At one end there are those who choose to leave their homeland to take up residence in another country for personal reasons, economic and social. At the other end of the migration spectrum are those who are forced to leave their homeland because of the threat of violence, the destruction of warfare, persecution, starvation, or natural disasters. Countries that have become targets for mass migrations often struggle to balance humanitarian concerns with their nation's legal immigration and refugee policies.

Today, virtually no countries have open borders. Passports and visas for entry became widespread after World War I. Every country has its own laws and policies about who is permitted to enter legally and the process for doing so (via visas, applying for asylum, etc.). Some countries, like those in the European Union, have border treaties with other countries that exempt their citizens from passport control. Many of those who migrate to other countries attempt to get some type of visa, but travel visa requirements vary from country to country. Because of the fluidity of today's migration patterns, some countries have created temporary

residency and work status for immigrants and refugees and have provided a variety of resettlement assistance programs.

Many nations, like the U.S., do not allow non-citizens to enter their nation without passports, proper qualifications, or some specific status (worker permits, limited-stay tourist visa, student visas, etc.). Some nations do not allow their citizens to travel freely outside their nation without documentation to do so. The Henley Passport Index—a global ranking of countries according to the travel freedom for their citizens—provides a ranking of the 199 passports in the world according to the number of countries their holders can travel to visa-free.

At the end of 2017, there were approximately 25.4 million refugees and 3.1 million asylum seekers worldwide. Generally, “refugees” were defined in the 1951 Refugees Convention as a “person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail him or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution.” In most countries, refugees must apply for asylum and provide some proof of their status or condition within this definition of a refugee, which the state uses to either grant or deny asylum. With increasing global political and economic instabilities in numerous regions of the world, mass migrations in recent years have included an increase in those claiming to be refugees. This has left some targeted nations overwhelmed in terms of processing refugees—determining whether or not applicants are escaping from dangerous situations in their homeland or are simply seeking better living conditions and greater opportunity.

There are two views of the economic impact of immigrants. One is that they contribute to the economy by bringing their skills, initiative, and creativity to their host country, often accepting jobs that citizens don't want because of lower wages or difficult working hours or conditions. The other view argues that immigrants take away job opportunities from residents and use government services, placing a greater tax burden on the native population. Some claim that immigrants dilute a country's culture and weaken the existing social fabric of a nation due to their religious, moral, or cultural values. Also it is often claimed that many immigrants are actually criminals. Consequently, in many of the world's destination countries, both governments and the public believe immigration should be limited.

Limitations on mass migrations take two main forms: actively preventing people from migrating into another country (and returning them when they are without legal status) or incentivizing people to stay in their country of origin or in a transit country. Immigration prevention measures usually take the form of making illegal entries more difficult by strengthening border security and barriers. In the effort to prevent the flow of unwelcome mass migrations, some countries,

like Turkey and the EU, have developed bilateral and multilateral agreements to stop migrations in transit countries or to aid home countries in keeping their citizens from taking life-threatening risks to migrate elsewhere (Libya/Italy agreement). The incentive approach takes the form of developmental policies and programs in the countries of origin from which mass migrations occur. The assumption is that improvements to the economic, social, or political well-being of a unstable or troubled home country will make people less likely to leave. In Europe, the UN's International Organization for Migration program is a 25 million euro initiative that supports “economic reintegration” for those who return to their home countries in the form of “Start Your Own Business” training and support. In 2016 two “Global Compacts” were developed by the UN in consultation with impacted nations. One of these international compacts is aimed at dealing with refugee issues (self-reliance and resettlement strategies) and the other is designed to address migrant issues (protections of migrants in transit and supporting disaster risk reduction in home countries). One of the big challenges to the international effort to address mass migrations is how to effectively constrain the migrant smuggling industry that seeks to circumvent or undermine international laws and agreements.

The migration of people from nations that are under-developed, politically troubled or face natural disasters to more prosperous and stable nations is likely to continue. Solutions aimed at simply stopping mass migrations have proven ineffective. This is because they fail to deal with the root causes—war, political instability and natural disasters. Consequently, mass migrations are unlikely to be effectively addressed until these root causes are explicitly identified and addressed. Do we want to continue to ignore these root causes or deal with them? What can we do?