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## Exodus

How Migration Is Changing Our World

Paul Collier • Oxford UP © 2015 • 320 pages

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Politics / Global Risks / Migration

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### Take-Aways

- Countries with a strong sense of nationalism tend to have stricter immigration policies.
- The rate at which immigrant and indigenous populations merge depends upon their cultural gaps.
- Assimilation typically benefits individuals and society.
- The immigrant population dominates London's inner city.
- Immigrants in Europe experience pronounced cultural separatism.
- Low-skilled immigrants and the indigenous poor compete for the same social housing.
- Government policy should prevent migration from running amok without stopping it completely.
- The larger a community's immigration population, the more unhappy its native citizens tend to be.
- Financial and legal obstacles prevent many poor people from migrating.
- Sensible migration policy takes into account the migrants, the countries they leave behind and the indigenous populations of host countries.

## Recommendation

On the face of it, migration is not complex – poor people move to more prosperous countries, war-torn people flee – but it generates multifaceted effects. Governments struggle to establish policies that are fair to immigrants and indigenous populations. Economics professor Paul Collier, author of *The Bottom Billion*, considers the economic, social and political ramifications of migration. He examines migration from three standpoints: how it affects migrants, the lands where they relocate and the countries they leave behind. Though he provides an informative, thought-provoking backgrounder on some pressing immigration issues, Collier didn't experience everything you'll know when you read this summary, and he's writing from a slightly academic perspective. Still, *getAbstract* recommends his insights to anyone trying to get a handle on some of the factors that shape this critically relevant subject.

## Summary

### A Complicated Issue

Few issues are as complex and controversial as migration. While the public seems to applaud refugees for fleeing oppressive poverty in their native lands, it simultaneously criticizes them for abandoning those left behind and it debates refugees' potential impact on the countries they enter.

*“Moral positions on migration are confusingly bound up with those on poverty, nationalism and racism.”*

National migration policies differ greatly. Japan doesn't permit immigration; Dubai's resident population is 95% foreigners. Australia and Canada have stricter educational demands for immigrants than the United States. Some countries rapidly grant citizenship rights to migrants; others insist migrants assimilate slowly.

*“Countries vary in their success in enabling immigrants and their children to take on the norms of their new society. Among the most successful is America.”*

Reaching an objective evaluation of migration policy proves nearly impossible since immigration policies spring from subjective moral principles and values. You can believe in a moral obligation to help the poor and not want poverty-stricken people flooding your borders. Nationalism and immigration restrictions are strongly correlated. Immigration advocates may view opposition to immigration as racism, since migrants' racial identity typically varies from that of the indigenous populations in many host countries.

### Approaching Migration Thoughtfully

A thoughtful evaluation of migration must consider its impact on:

- **The migrants** – They typically overcome formidable obstacles to leave their homelands, but can realize considerable financial gains in new countries.
- **The people whom migrants leave behind** – Do their situations deteriorate, or do they benefit from “a lifeline of support” in the form of remittances from relatives abroad?

- **The indigenous people** – What are the economic and social ramifications of immigration on a host societies' underprivileged citizens?

## The Workings of Assimilation

The question is not whether migration's consequences are positive or negative, but "how much is best." The answer depends on how quickly migrants assimilate. Their impact remains strictly economic in societies that regard migrants only as laborers. But in most instances, migrants blend into society and boost multiculturalism. The speed at which migrant families embrace the standards and culture of their new societies largely depends on the countries to which they move.

*"The pertinent question is not whether migration harms or benefits countries of origin, but whether faster migration would harm or benefit them."*

Immigrant children raised in the US invariably adopt American values; that is not the case for European immigrants. Children of European immigrants resist absorbing a host country's national identity more so than their parents. In America, the larger a community's immigrant population, the lower the trust levels between immigrants and indigenous people – and among the groups themselves. Diversity poses a "challenge to social solidarity." The rate at which migrants and native populations merge depends on the size of the cultural gaps that separate them.

## Migrant "Narratives"

These four narratives typically delineate different migrant populations:

1. They arrive in a foreign country intending to accept the culture and assimilate.
2. They expect to blend in while adding a bit of distinctive cultural flavor to the society.
3. They plan to remain culturally separate while participating economically.
4. They want to spread their culture among the native population.

*"The vagaries of making policy on migration reflect a toxic context of high emotion and little knowledge."*

Assimilation benefits all groups. Immigrants who are willing to learn the host nation's language equip themselves to function more effectively in society. Stronger trust levels between immigrants and indigenous populations increase the likelihood of intermarriage and the establishment of a common legacy and identity. For instance, until the 1950s, migration minimally affected most European countries. The majority of British citizens could trace their lineage back for decades. But through intermarriage, assimilated migrants give rise to future generations with roots in a common heritage.

*"Almost all the small, poor countries have ended up losers from migration."*

Immigrants seeking to impart their culture create a positive environment that encourages open-mindedness and acceptance. In such cases, immigrants and indigenous groups prove willing to learn about the other without exerting superiority. The most popular national dish in Britain, surpassing fish and chips, is chicken

tikka, which a British immigrant created by fusing his cultural know-how with “an indigenous demand for fast food.”

*“Not only is assimilation ethically well-based, but its practical consequences are benign. Trust remains at a high level because migrants absorb the attitudes of the indigenous.”*

Without governmental intervention, immigrants tend to populate areas where fellow immigrants already reside. Some countries, such as Canada, have required immigrants to settle in particular areas. Britain once sent several Somali migrants to Glasgow, but a racial attack resulting in a Somali’s murder ended the experiment. Immigrants to England increasingly favor certain cities and make up the majority of London’s population. The indigenous British moved from London’s inner districts to its outer. Nearly 50% of Bangladeshi immigrants in England live in Tower Hamlets, a borough in inner London that grew about 25% in 10 years.

*“Many people simply cannot afford to migrate: it is a form of investment. Like all investments, costs have to be incurred up front, while benefits come gradually over time.”*

Separatism, though harder to quantify, has become more recognizable, possibly due to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. In France, second-generation Muslim immigrants are more hesitant than their parents to allow their children to eat in school cafeterias. In Britain, many Bangladeshi women wear full veils even though women in Bangladesh don’t wear them.

*“While nationalism does not necessarily imply restrictions on immigration, it is clearly the case that without a sense of nationalism there would be no basis for restrictions.”*

Rates of assimilation tend to be slower when poorer immigrants migrate to prosperous societies. The incoming migrants often face racism and job discrimination, pushing them to remain separate. Government policies greatly influence the mind-sets of both migrant and indigenous populations. Immigrants tend to protect their cultural uniqueness in countries that promote multiculturalism. Migrants assimilate more slowly when they benefit from welfare systems.

## Migration’s Bottom Line

A recent study of the economic consequences of migration in Britain indicates that reducing lower-end wages accompanies increased wages “along the rest of the spectrum.” These raises outdistance the reductions and so, in general, migration benefits indigenous workers. Immigrants make the labor market more efficient and productive, thus enabling business owners to pay higher wages. However, the assumption that unchecked migration would seriously reduce wages for indigenous workers is not reasonable.

*“China has benefited so much from migration because a high proportion of its students choose to return.”*

Migration’s effects on wages pale in comparison to its impact on housing since poor immigrants and indigenous impoverished people often compete for the same low-cost or “social” housing. Large immigrant families tend to live in the same poor neighborhoods as native families.

Host countries must wrestle with the politically and ethically charged issue of whether migrants should have access to social housing. Opponents argue that the mere act of migration provides immigrants with advantages not obtainable in their native countries, so transferring “a disproportionate share of social housing to them” is unfair. As migrants become acclimated, some will compete for private housing. Britain’s Office of Budgetary Responsibility estimated that migration has increased housing prices by roughly 10%.

## Economic Suppositions

Economists look favorably upon the migration movement based on these suppositions:

- **Migrants ultimately benefit society over time** – Migrants are extraordinarily innovative. In the US, “immigrants and their children account for a disproportionate number of patented inventions.” However, the possibility exists that the brightest entrepreneurs choose entrepreneurial America over other countries.
- **Migrant families have a greater drive to succeed than indigenous citizens** – The children of immigrants in the US are better educated and make more money than children born as American citizens. About 90% of the student body in the best school in Sydney, Australia, is made up of East Asian students. The populations of Stuyvesant and Bronx Science, two of the finest public schools in New York City, are around 75% Asian. East Asians represent approximately 50% of the students in Canadian colleges.
- **Migrants can compensate for shortages in the labor force** – Germany recruited skilled Asian workers to address an information technology labor scarcity in the 1990s. France brought in construction workers from North Africa in the 1950s. In the 1970s, Britain recruited nurses from throughout the Commonwealth. Companies capable of importing talent may become reluctant to invest in training indigenous workers.

*“Because family ties are privileged in the allocation of visas, diasporas create opportunities for the legal access of subsequent migrants.”*

Effective government migration policy should prevent migration from spinning out of control rather than stopping it completely. Generally, moderate migration produces mostly positive economic effects and “ambiguous” social consequences for the local population. Migration’s impact largely depends on the country and population it affects. Thinly populated countries are likely to benefit in the long run; more densely populated countries may enjoy a short-term economic boost, but could face complicated and protracted social difficulties. One study suggests that the larger a community’s immigrant population, the more unhappy its native citizens are.

## Winners and Losers

Migration benefits those who move from poor countries to richer ones. The vast difference in wages from nation to nation underscores the disparity between the rich world and the “bottom billion.” Though not all immigrants receive high wages, they earn more than their counterparts in poor countries. This “productivity gap” stems from systematic differences in particular countries’ social models, not from the characteristics of the workers. Many poor countries suffer from flawed social models. Migrants seeking higher wages should

also evaluate the financial health of the countries they contemplate entering; tax and welfare systems are important considerations.

*“Migrants are not in close competition with indigenous workers, even in respect to those indigenous workers who have a similar level of education.”*

Many citizens of poor countries would like to migrate, but they face financial and legal obstacles. Someone making less than \$2,000 annually would have to save for years just to afford transportation. They would ideally recoup their investment once they migrate, but no one has any guarantee of employment. Even with reasonable odds of success, many fear taking the financial risk. The poorest people simply cannot seize the transformative potential of migration. Restrictions on immigration into high-income countries are the other major hindrance. Most countries impose educational and professional requirements; Australia, Canada and the US have the most demanding educational prerequisites.

*“In setting migration policy, host governments will need to balance the interests of the indigenous poor against the interests of migrants and of those left behind in poor countries.”*

Migrants often resort to illegal means to enter a host country. The most common tactic is to pay off a visa officer in the host country’s local embassy. Some migrants try to use other people’s passports or other legal documents, though that has become increasingly difficult due to improved security. The “ultimate option,” while costly and dangerous, is to enter a country illegally, typically with the help of professional smugglers.

*“Moderate migration has economic effects on the indigenous population that in the short and medium term are marginal, and most probably modestly positive.”*

Migration harms those who already migrated because primary competition for low-skilled jobs comes mostly from incoming migrants, not indigenous workers. Members of the indigenous population maintain certain advantages: they speak the language, they are more socially adept and they benefit from employers’ prejudice against immigrants. Immigrants try to bring relatives to host nations, thus adding competition to the job market.

## **A Matter of Policy**

One big question is whether host societies should focus on self-interest or consider the interests of every group when they establish migration policies. Absolute refusal to “restrict individual freedom” could facilitate mass exoduses from poor countries and create immigrant majorities in host countries. Sensible migration policy takes into account immigrants, the countries they leave behind and the indigenous population. Ideally, migrants would return to their native lands after upgrading their education, but countries of origin have no say over the “emigration rate or the rate of return.” Though migration, over time, has not damaged the poor people left behind or the populations of host countries, policy makers need “preventative policies,” not “reactive ones.”

## About the Author

Economics and public policy professor **Paul Collier** also wrote *The Plundered Planet* and *The Bottom Billion*.



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