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Exceptional People

How Migration Shaped Our World and Will Define Our Future

Ian Goldin, Geoffrey Cameron and Meera Balarajan • Princeton UP © 2011 • 392 pages

Society

Politics / Global Risks / Migration

History

Take-Aways

- Migration has shaped the civilized world.
- The number of migrants has doubled in recent years and will increase in the future.
- The age of mass migration, from 1840 to 1914, saw relatively open borders worldwide.
- World War II created 30 million refugees.
- Controlled borders and restrictions led to the age of “managed migration,” 1914 to 1973.
- Due to globalization, “cross-border flows” have increased steadily since the 1970s.
- Modern migration works on three levels: “micro” family movement; “meso” travel with group support and “macro” shifts driven by “demographics, politics and economics.”
- National migration authorities should extend current transnational pacts.
- Better policies would support migrants’ advancement, enable legal migration, collect better data on migrant flows, and combat “xenophobia, discrimination and abuse.”
- Opening all borders would create estimated economic benefits of \$39 trillion over a 25-year period.

Recommendation

Every now and then, a book sheds light on a hot topic in the news. That is what Ian Goldin, Geoffrey Cameron and Meera Balarajan have done for the issue of immigration. The authors offer solid background information to support their recommendations about migration policies. If current news stories make you think that immigration concerns only restrictive borders, higher walls, bigger detention centers, needy asylum seekers, a drain on state resources and the control of incipient terrorism, perhaps that's because the media do not cover the substantial economic benefits migration delivers to both receiving and sending nations. With a note that the political opinions expressed are those of the authors, *getAbstract* recommends this illuminating compilation about migrants who bravely traveled to shape the modern world.

Summary

A World of Migrants

The number of migrants worldwide has skyrocketed in the past 25 years, but that trend only mirrors the past. Migration is one of humankind's most ancient imperatives, tracing back tens of thousands of years, all the way to early human movement out of Africa and across the globe. Migration, which has defined the human race since prehistory, created the modern world.

"Globalization and migration are intertwined processes that are leading humanity to the same cosmopolitan future, where people, goods, ideas and finance are able to flow more freely across national borders."

Migrants have moved to establish better lives for themselves and their children; to attain security and peace; to flee repression, turmoil, war or disaster; and to realize their potential as human beings. Stone Age humans moved constantly from one place to another in search of food. Over time, groups of prehistoric hunter-gatherers left Africa – humankind's original home – and traveled upward throughout the Arabian Peninsula.

"Current ad hoc regulations are poorly suited for a world economy that thrives on openness, diversity, innovation and exchange."

Some 50,000 to 60,000 years ago, after innumerable additional migrations, humans had populated the seacoasts of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. Eventually, they moved into Europe and Asia and, later, throughout the Americas. By about 10,000 years ago, humans had migrated to every continent except Antarctica. The seafaring Polynesians settled throughout the South Pacific, including Fiji (3,600 years ago), Hawaii (1,600 years ago) and New Zealand (1,000 years ago).

"There are now more than 200 million migrants in the world, making up almost 3% of the world's population."

Migratory humans established extensive trade networks across the globe. Civilization flourished through the mechanism of “migrant-powered exchange[s],” according to historian William H. McNeill. He observed that such exchanges “provided a major – perhaps the major – stimulus to change within civilized communities.”

The Age of Mass Migration

During the age of mass migration in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries – about 1840 to 1914 – countries seldom restricted migration. Liberal champions of open migration promoted accessible borders across the globe. In 1889, the International Emigration Conference issued this statement: “We affirm the right of the individual to the fundamental liberty accorded to him by every civilized nation to come and go and dispose of his person and his destinies as he pleases.”

“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.”

During this period, people moved across the planet in large numbers, using well-established global transportation networks. New migrants increased the US labor force by a factor of one-third. During the 1870s, nearly 600,000 people from Europe migrated to the US each year; that grew to more than one million people annually in the first few years of the 20th century, and to more than three million each year shortly thereafter.

“The Global Commission on International Migration estimated that 2.5 to 4 million people move across borders every year without authorization.”

In total, during 100 years from 1820 and 1920, approximately 60 million Europeans migrated to the New World. At the same time, an increasing number of Europeans moved to other European nations. England and Germany became magnets for European migrants. On the other side of the globe, millions of people were migrating among Asian countries. Some 50 million people from China and India relocated to Southeast Asia.

“Migration both relies on networks and creates and reinforces them.”

Open migration wound down early in the 20th century as many nations imposed stricter barriers. These restrictions paralleled the rise of nationalism, along with growing demands from native populations to restrict migration to their countries. Prejudices, xenophobia and racial animus against foreigners, as well as a desire to preserve traditional national identities, often accounted for such demands. Many citizens of “destination countries” assumed that most migrants were “refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants.” Today, those individuals make up less than a third of the migratory demographic.

“Managed Migration”

The age of open migration morphed into the era of managed migration from 1914 to 1973. During this period, national identity became an important issue, as did passports and other forms of “citizen identification.” Countries tried to optimize migration and restrict “cross-border movement,” but such

control proved difficult to achieve. World War II, which created 30 million refugees, made migration issues even more complicated.

“The history of migration is narrated by tragedy and warfare and much as by commerce and education.”

Since the 1970s, global integration and “cross-border flows” have steadily increased. The causal factors include mass shipping, trading and communication, as well as the development of robust transnational and social networks. Strong parallels link the modern era and the 1840-1914 era of open migration. However, many destination countries have instituted rigorous migration controls.

“Borders enclose many people within a poverty trap.”

Many nations police their borders more rigorously than ever, even though most border-control measures are largely ineffective. For proof, consider the estimated 12 million undocumented migrants in the US. Many migrants enter the US and other destination countries legally, then remain past their prescribed exit dates. In a dynamic that seems likely to endure, they earn rock-bottom wages in well-entrenched shadow economies.

“Visa-Free Migration”

Some nations share relationships that allow visa-free migration. For example, under some restrictions, citizens of the European Union can “reside, work and access social benefits” in any member nation. Australia and New Zealand share a similarly reciprocal, open-migration system.

“Some migrants can be a burden on public services in the short run, but in the long run, most will make a net contribution.”

Today, a new “age of migration” is unfolding at three different levels:

1. **“Micro-level”** – For unmarried people and families, migration is a personal, if constrained, choice. When logistically and economically feasible, many people migrate to improve their lives.
2. **“Meso-level”** – Migration has become an increasingly workable option due to support networks established to help migrants.
3. **“Macro-level”** – “Demographic, economic and political” factors directly affect the “push” and “pull” of migration.

“Developed countries cannot continue to meet the growing gaps in their workforces through growth in undocumented migration.”

Climate change, a notable macro-level factor, will spur the migration of “environmental refugees” in years to come. Although “demographic migration” is not a long-term answer to developed nations’ growing workforce gaps, young migrants will arrive to join the workforce as aging workers retire. Such macro-level dynamics work in league with individual migration (micro-level) and the presence or lack of facilitative networks (meso-level) to increase migration for some groups of people, but not others. For example, in the

future, forecasters expect more people to migrate from sub-Saharan Africa and fewer to leave Caribbean or Latin American nations.

“Principles of Global Migration”

Concerned parties worldwide advocated stronger “global governance of international migrations.”

International leaders should shape their migration planning and governance according to five principles:

- **“Extend transnational rights”** – When they relocate, most migrants do not cut their ties to their countries of origin. They send substantial remittances home to family members. People now often engage in “circular migration,” moving back and forth on a regular basis from their new countries to their nations of origin. Their individual political rights and benefits should be fully portable and should accompany them wherever they go.
- **“Promote social and economic advancement for migrants”** – Migrants have special needs, including “language training, quality education and recognition of foreign qualifications (or access to upgrading).” Their new nations should help migrants secure the support they need to function and, later, to thrive.
- **“Widen the umbrella of legal migration”** – Rather than enhance border-control measures to make migration more difficult, nations should make it easier for people to cross their borders. Countries can establish guest-worker programs and set up “regularization processes” that enable undocumented individuals living within their borders to become legalized.
- **“Combat xenophobia, discrimination and abuse”** – To eliminate discrimination against migrants, nations should enforce current laws, pass appropriate legislation, and solicit the media to educate the public.
- **“Improve data collection”** – Most countries lack adequate information about the movement of migrants across their borders. The best way for nations to secure this valuable data is to conduct a census that asks for each person’s “country of citizenship, country of birth and country of last residence.”

Benefits of Immigration

Throughout prehistory and history, migration has been and remains irrepressible. No nation has ever stopped migration and none ever will. Although receiving nations pay certain short-term costs for migration, its long-term benefits outweigh these problems. Open borders and increased migration help everyone involved – the people who uproot themselves from their homes to make new lives in distant lands, and the nations they leave or enter.

“Over the last 25 years, the total number of international migrants doubled, and...this strong growth will be amplified over the next 50 years.”

Migrants contribute substantially to the economic growth of their new nations and help their old ones through regular remittances. Some economists suggest that fully opening national borders would produce an economic boom valued at up to \$39 trillion over a 25-year period. Migrants increase productivity and help eliminate workforce gaps. They enhance social diversity and foster innovation. In most cases, migration proves to be a big plus for individual migrants. Often, they can improve their incomes, realize

their full potential and lead better lives. Migration enables some people to escape natural disasters or brutal dictatorships.

“Accelerating cross-border movements of goods, services, ideas and capital are drawing the regions of the world into an interdependent and interconnected community.”

Considering these factors, why don't more political leaders support international migration? Generally, many of migration's benefits are long-term, and politicians often operate only in the short-term. Some politicians may be driven by economic and employment concerns, fear or bias; many see migration as a problematic activity they must manage and minimize, not as a societal good they want to promote.

Global Leadership

Leaders should cooperate to promote migration in all countries, both those losing migrants and those receiving them. At present, a smorgasbord of disjointed laws and regulations applies to international migration. No single international organization has a clear commission to affect international migration policy. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) – with 420 field offices in 120 nations – has the expertise and potential to affect transnational migration, but it is not a United Nations (UN) organization. The IOM's original mission was to assist people displaced after World War II, so it functions under a limited mandate. For this to change, the UN should make the IOM an integral component of its operations, with the mission of opening global migration.

“As our distant ancestors would have told us, the earth is one country and all of humanity its citizens.”

Individual nations should work together and build on current regional migration pacts to establish “cross-border mobility,” develop an accepted system of “global migration governance,” and protect migrants' welfare and human rights. However, nations' focus on their individual well-being often outweighs international collaboration. As a result, few states seem likely to bypass domestic concerns to enact a global migration package in the foreseeable future.

History demonstrates that over time, certain patterns prevail. One such pattern is the central role that peoples of different cultures play in the development of national societies. In earlier times, most people thought that “democracy, free trade” and “global peace” were impractical and impossible. Today, many people take these benefits for granted. Will the unfettered movement of peoples worldwide be the next step in building a global society?

About the Authors

Ian Goldin, a professor of globalization and development at the University of Oxford, directs the Oxford Martin School where **Geoffrey Cameron** is a research associate. **Meera Balarajan** has worked for the UN, the UK government and an Indian NGO.



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