

International Migration

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Migrants seek freedom, opportunity, fortune or power. Migrations are often triggered by drought, famine, war, plague and natural disasters, but some have been forced by slavery, conflict and persecution. Others have been voluntary or religion-based. Over the last 50 years, the rate, magnitude and effects of immigration have been exacerbated by increasing populations and various conflicts. Today, there are more than 230 million international migrants.

People have the right to migrate, according to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Subsequent protocols and conventions on the status of refugees further defined who qualifies as a refugee, clarifying the rights and obligations of individuals and states involved. After Sept. 11, 2001, concern for national security threats from immigrants increased; however, governments have had to balance the demands of keeping populations safe and accepting new immigrants. This difficult subject has many different facets and has proved challenging to the international community.

In the past, immigration was limited by poor transportation, social structures and an inability to communicate effectively. As transportation improved, traders, wars and settlers became more common. Some of the largest movements of people happened because of political changes. One example was the rise of the Arab Islamic Empires in the southern part of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East in the 7th century. The Mongol invasions in the 13th century also caused a large movement of people. In addition, the colonial period of the 16th century brought European migration to such places as Australia and the Western Hemisphere. The period following the First World War and the Great Depression caused a temporary drop in immigration, but after the recovery of global markets, it rebounded.

The portion of the planet's population that is classified as international migrants varies somewhere between 2.2 percent and 3.2 percent, with projections as high as 3.6 percent by the end of the century. This percentage is weighted toward developing countries where opportunities are fewer. Rates for developing countries can be as high as 11 percent. Different countries can have wildly varying levels of populations of immigrants. The United States has a high number of immigrants at 46 million, but the highest percentage of immigrants belongs to the United Arab Emirates at 84 percent. This is closely followed by Qatar and Kuwait, which are at 74 percent and 60 percent, respectively. While these numbers overall are a very low percentage of the global population, they do effect the demographics of these countries significantly.

Looking to the future, immigration will continue to be at the forefront of issues for the international community. There are pros and cons to both sides of the arguments for and against allowing immigration to continue. Many of these choices will come down to the ability to care for, support and recognize the human rights of all peoples involved. Human trafficking in

particular is a concern even in such developed nations as the United States, and immigration reform can be a tangible way to combat this negative impact of global migration.