International Migration: Facing the Challenge

By Philip Martin and Jonas Widgren

Migration is likely to increase in the 21st century.

Most migration occurs between less developed countries.

International migrants are less than 3 percent of world population.
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"Man is of all sorts of luggage the most difficult to be transported." — Adam Smith

International migration—people moving across national borders—is a global challenge for the 21st century. More than 190 nation-states issue their own passports and visas and regulate who can cross their borders and stay. At least 160 million people were living outside their country of birth or citizenship in 2000, up from an estimated 120 million in 1990. If the world’s migrants were in one place, they would create the world’s sixth most populous country (after China, India, the United States, Indonesia, and Brazil).

Most of the world’s 6.1 billion people never cross a national border—they will live and die near their place of birth. Most people who do cross national borders will move only a short distance to nearby countries. But more than 80 percent of the world’s population live in less developed countries, and most international migrants move from one less developed nation to another. Still, at least 40 percent of the world’s international migrants live in a handful of industrialized countries, including the United States, and their presence raises major socioeconomic issues in the countries of origin and countries of destination. This Population Bulletin explains why people cross national borders, why such migration is often controversial, and how migration can be managed more effectively in the 21st century. International migration is examined within the major world regions—North and South America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East, Africa, and Oceania.

Thinking About Migration

Migration is as old as humans wandering in search of food, but international migration is a relatively recent phenomenon: It was only in the early
20th century that the system of nation-states, passports, and visas developed to regulate the flow of people across national borders. The volume of the flow fluctuates, depending on world events. In 1965, an estimated 75 million people were living outside their country of birth, but this was less than 3 percent of world population. The migrant proportion of world population has increased only slightly since then (see Figure 1).

Migration is the exception, not the rule, for two major reasons. The first and most powerful is inertia: Most people lack the desire and drive to leave home and move away from family and friends. The second reason is that the movement of people across a country’s borders is controlled by national governments. Governments have significant capacity to regulate migration through passports, visas, and border controls.

Nevertheless, the management of international migration is likely to become more controversial, difficult, and urgent in the 21st century. There were about 190 recognized nation-states in 2000, up from just 43 in 1900. Each nation-state has a system of passports to distinguish citizens from foreigners, border controls to inspect persons who want to enter, and policies that affect the settlement and integration of noncitizens. Most countries do not anticipate the arrival of foreigners who wish to settle and become naturalized citizens, and they discourage immigration through laws and border controls. Some nations also discourage emigration. The efforts of the former Soviet Union and Eastern bloc nations to prevent emigration were symbolized by the Berlin Wall until 1989. North Korea continues to prohibit emigration of its citizens.

There are just five major countries that officially welcome international migrants as permanent residents: the United States, Canada, Australia, Israel, and New Zealand. Collectively these countries accept 1.2 million immigrants a year. About 800,000 immigrants each year are officially admitted to the United States; 200,000 to Canada; 75,000 to Australia; 65,000 to Israel; and 35,000 to New Zealand. But these figures account for a small percentage of the estimated annual global immigration, which means that most people who take up residence in another country each year are not accepted as official immigrants. Instead, many migrants are refugees seeking protection; guest workers who are expected to depart after several years of work; and unauthorized or illegal foreigners who enter and settle in defiance of immigration laws.

Migration may be viewed as a natural and predictable response to differences in the countries of origin and destination—differences in resources and jobs, in demographic growth, and in security and human rights. In the past, significant economic, demographic, and sociopolitical differences between areas have prompted large-scale migration. In

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**Figure 1**


Population (millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Nonmigrants</th>
<th>Migrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>3,225</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>4,695</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5,932</td>
<td>6,100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1800, Europe had 20 percent of the world's nearly 1 billion residents, while the Americas had 3 percent. During the 19th century, millions of Europeans emigrated to North and South America in search of economic opportunity and religious and political freedom. Two centuries later, Europe has just 12 percent of the world's 6 billion people while North and South America together have about 14 percent.

Another shift of population may occur in the next century as population growth and a lack of economic opportunities in one region foster large-scale migration to another, more prosperous, region. In the 21st century, Africa is likely to be a major source of migrants, as young people move from overcrowded cities in Africa to industrial societies with slow-growing or declining populations and a high proportion of older residents. Large numbers of migrants from Africa already are beginning to arrive in Europe in search of jobs.

How will the industrial democracies with growing proportions of elderly residents react to the large-scale immigration of young people from less developed countries? The industrialized countries have already stepped up their expenditures on border controls, and have taken other steps that, critics argue, make the 25 richest nations appear to be islands of wealth defended by ever-higher walls to keep out migrants escaping a sea of poverty. The U.S. government, for example, increased the budget of the Immigration and Naturalization Service from $1 billion in 1990 to $4 billion in 2000, a decade in which most federal agencies did not receive significant additional funds. Further increases are expected following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks by foreign terrorists, as many Americans view foreigners as a potential source of violence as well as an economic threat (see Box 1, page 6). Spending on immigration controls in Western European countries similarly tripled and quadrupled in the 1990s.

Critics of stepped-up immigration controls argue that industrialized countries need young migrants for economic and demographic reasons: Migrants keep social security systems viable and slow population aging. This view was championed by the late economist Julian Simon, who argued that people were "the ultimate resource" in his book of the same name, and that immigration was economically desirable because more people meant more creativity and growth.

But some analysts believe that, regardless of whether migration has a positive or negative effect, the industrialized countries will not be able to stop the arrival of desperate migrants, and that only military force can prevent shipsloads or armies of poor migrants attempting to sail or march into rich countries, threatening their security. Some leaders of less developed countries have emphasized the need for more foreign aid from wealthy countries to slow emigration. The late President Houari Boumedienne of Algeria and leader of the Group of 77 less developed nations warned that if the rich countries did not provide more foreign aid: "No quantity of atomic bombs could stem the tide of billions ... who will some day leave the poor southern part of the world to erupt into the relatively accessible spaces of the rich northern hemisphere looking for survival."

But most experts maintain that migration is a manageable challenge. They emphasize that most people do not want to cross national borders, and that the world's migrants are less than 3 percent of the world's population, despite leaky borders. Mexico-U.S. migration provides an example of the desire of most people to stay home. There are about 109 million persons alive today who were born in Mexico and less than 9 million of them are in the United States legally or illegally. Despite a century of Mexico-U.S. migration over the 2,000-mile border, at least 90 percent of persons born in Mexico live in Mexico.
Why People Migrate

International migration is usually a major individual or family decision that is carefully considered—crossing national borders to settle or work in another country is not an easy decision. There are two broad categories of migrants: those who decided to migrate to another country for primarily economic reasons, and those who moved primarily for noneconomic reasons (see Table 1, page 8). The factors that encourage a migrant to actually move are grouped into three categories: demand-pull, supply-push, and network factors. Economic migrants may, for example, be encouraged to migrate by demand-

Box 1

Can Immigration Policies Thwart Terrorism?

On Sept. 11, 2001, 19 men hijacked four planes over U.S. airspace and, using the planes as bombs, caused the deaths of more than 3,000 people. The hijackers apparently were foreigners who had been in the United States from a week to several years. At least 16 had entered with legal student or tourist visas.

In the wake of the attacks, the United States and many other countries are examining their immigration policies and considering ways to thwart potential terrorists. Immigration policy reforms cannot prevent terrorism, but they are a key part of any effort to combat terrorism. Immigration policies aim to facilitate the entry of wanted foreigners, and to identify and deter the entry of terrorists and other unwanted foreigners.

Policy Reform Challenges

The Sept. 11 terrorist attacks highlighted four reasons that current U.S. immigration policy does little to thwart international terrorists. First, the procedures for obtaining visas and identification documents do not deter potential criminals from entering the country. All the hijackers were able to obtain seemingly valid visas with supporting documents.

Second, illegal entry into the country is relatively easy, even without visas, because of the long and lightly guarded national border. In December 1999, Algerian Ahmed Ressam was caught attempting to enter the United States from Canada with bomb-making materials that he planned to use to bomb the Los Angeles International Airport during the millennium celebrations.

Third, the U.S. government does not track the movements of foreigners inside the country. For example, one of the Sept. 11 hijackers was admitted to the United States to study English, but he never showed up at the school that admitted him. There is no system to alert law enforcement of visa violations that might uncover a potential terrorist plot. Several of the hijackers were in the country with expired visas.

Fourth, there has been (until recently) little cooperation or information-sharing among countries about terrorist suspects.

There are three major areas in which changes in immigration policies may be able to counter future terrorist threats: visa issuance and entry inspections, border controls, and interior enforcement. The United States may also have to pay special attention to foreign students and consider harmonizing immigration and asylum policies with Canada to preserve a fairly open Canada-U.S. border.

Entries to the United States are screened through the National Automated Immigration Lookout System, or NAILS, which contains the names of foreigners believed to pose a security risk to the United States. But false names supported by fraudulent documentation can fool NAILS. An improved lookout database must be capable of matching not only names, which can be easily changed, but also biometrics such as fingerprints and facial characteristics. NAILS could be enlarged with information from the FBI.

Another way to tighten the borders is to track the entries and exits of all for-
pull guest worker recruitment; noneconomic migrants might be motivated to cross borders to join family members settled abroad. A man living in rural Mexico, for example, may be offered a job in the United States by a recruiter, or hear about U.S. job openings on the radio—a demand-pull factor. This potential migrant may not have a job at home, or he may face crop failures, which make him willing to move—a supply-push factor. After obtaining information about U.S. work and wages from a returned migrant—a network factor—he decides to migrate from Mexico to the United States.

The three factors encouraging an individual to migrate do not have equal weights, and the weight of each

designed visitors. The current system to record entries and exits—via the I-94 form—is not effective for tracking potential criminals. Entry-exit tracking was opposed by Canada and northern U.S. states because its cost and inconvenience would hurt commuting, trade, and tourism.

Technology could ease some of these drawbacks and make it easier to track foreigners in the country. Australia, for example, uses an electronic visa that is incorporated into the airline ticket, which could be a model for a similar U.S. program. The United States already is experimenting with commuter lanes on the Mexico-U.S. border that permit officials to screen regular travelers and issue them special documentation and devices for their cars to speed crossings without sacrificing security.

The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) stepped up border enforcement in the 1990s by adding agents, fences, and lights along the borders in urban areas in Arizona, California, and Texas. Expanding this strategy to more of the 2,000 mile Mexican-U.S. border would help to deter unauthorized migrants, including potential terrorists. But expanding border controls would cost more money and would take time to implement.

Surveillance of foreigners already in the United States is a controversial issue because many view it as an unacceptable police presence. After the Sept. 11 attacks, many U.S. universities dropped their long-standing opposition to the tracking of foreign students, but many Americans oppose the idea of a national identification system that would require all U.S. residents to carry a counterfeit-resistant ID. The current system makes it easy for unauthorized foreigners to get “legal” identification. Three of the Sept. 11 hijackers apparently got Virginia driver’s licenses using fraudulent documents.

**International Cooperation**

The United States and Canada could harmonize their immigration and asylum policies to erect a “security perimeter” around the two countries, following the European Union (EU) model. The Schengen Agreement permits freer movement within the EU because entry and exit controls are done at the external border of the 13 participating countries. Such a system could be feasible with Canada, and perhaps eventually with Mexico.

International cooperation can help prevent terrorism from slowing economic globalization. Cooperation and data sharing can help to identify suspected terrorists and prevent them from moving from one country to another to carry out attacks. Cooperation will also be needed to combat smuggling and trafficking operations that could be used by terrorist organizations to move persons clandestinely.

Terrorists pose a formidable challenge common to all countries. But tackling terrorism is likely to result in closer cooperation among the industrialized countries, and gradually to a convergence in their immigration and asylum policies.

factor can change over time. Generally, demand-pull and supply-push factors are strongest at the beginnings of a migration flow, and network factors become more important as the migration stream matures. A common sequence begins with the recruitment of guest workers, often in rural areas where jobs are scarce. After these migrants return with information about job opportunities abroad, network factors may become more important in sustaining migration, so that even employed workers in Mexico may migrate to the United States for higher wages.

One of the most important noneconomic motivations for crossing national borders is family unification—a father working abroad wants to have his wife and children join him, for example. In such cases, the anchor immigrant is a demand-pull factor for family chain migration. The migrant’s immediate family may be followed by brothers and sisters, and then by their families.

Some migrants are impelled to cross national borders by war and political persecution at home. Some of these migrants qualify as refugees according to the 1951 Geneva Convention, which defines a refugee as a person residing outside his or her country of citizenship who is unwilling or unable to return because of “a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” Countries that signed the Geneva Convention pledged not to “refoul” or return persons to places where they could be persecuted. The United States and many other countries distinguish between refugees, who request entry into the United States for protection, and asylum seekers, who arrive in the United States, usually illegally, and then ask to stay because they face persecution at home.

Globalization has made more people aware of conditions and opportunities abroad. Tourism has become a major industry, as people cross national borders to experience new cultures or the wonders of nature. Many young people go abroad to study or work or simply for personal enrichment.

Some current migration streams reflect the traditional flows between former colonies and their colonizers. Long after these colonies gained independence, migration streams continue between India and Pakistan and the United Kingdom, for example, and between the Philippines and the United States.

Immigration policies aim to facilitate wanted migration, such as tourism, and to deter unwanted

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**Table 1**

**Determinants of Migration**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Migrant</th>
<th>Demand-Pull</th>
<th>Supply-Push</th>
<th>Network/Other</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Labor recruitment, better wages</td>
<td>Un- or underemployment; low wages</td>
<td>Job and wage information flows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noneconomic</td>
<td>Family unification</td>
<td>War and persecution</td>
<td>Communications; transportation; assistance organizations; desire for new experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: These examples are illustrative. Individuals contemplating migration may be encouraged to move by all three factors. The importance of pull, push, and network factors can change over time.
migration, such as migrants who arrive on tourist visas and do not depart as scheduled. But it is often hard for inspectors at ports of entry to distinguish a legitimate tourist from an unauthorized worker or settler. Most countries require visas from foreigners wishing to enter and maintain consulates abroad to screen visitors to determine if they truly intend to return home. About one-quarter of the nearly 10 million applications for visas to enter the United States each year are denied.

Regional Trends
Most people who cross national borders do not go far, so most international migrants stay within the same geographic region. But there are also major migration flows among regions, as shown in Figure 2. The volume and direction of these migration streams shift over time according to political and economic factors in the sending and receiving areas.

North and South America
The North American migration system includes the world’s major migration and immigration destinations, whether defined in per capita terms or by numbers, such as the 300,000 to 400,000 Mexicans who move each year to the United States. Canada and the United States include about 5 percent of the world’s population, but they receive more than one-half of the world’s immigrants.

Emigration rates are very high from many Caribbean nations. Jamaica, with 2.6 million residents in 2001, sent about 25,000 emigrants a year abroad in the mid-1990s, or nearly 1 percent of its population.

Canada
Canada has a relatively high rate of immigration, generous social welfare programs, and general public satisfaction with its immigration policies. Many analysts attribute public support for immigration among Canadians to an admissions system dominated by entrants who are screened to ensure stability.
This page is about the collocation face a challenge. collocation pattern: verb + noun. Meaning, to have to deal with a challenging situation. For example. The new president knew he'd have to face many difficult challenges. Trying to win the world championship was the biggest challenge Cathy had ever faced. Note: Related collocations include "face a problem" and "face a difficulty". Quick Quiz. If you're facing a challenge, you should think about. a. how to succeed. b. how to celebrate. It's hard to judge a celebrity's taste in fashion when they work with all kind of fashion designers and constantly get advised in matter of what to wear on the stage. But in this game, three world wide knows celebs (we won't tell you their names, but you will surely recognize them) are going to take the fashion challenge. They are going to pick their own outfits for their next show and you will be the one helping them dress up.