

# Migratory Flows on a Global Scale. An Overview

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## *Abstract*

*Migration at international level is a global phenomenon. In recent years the world experienced the highest number of people who migrated abroad. For example, in 2020 approximately 3.6% of global population were international migrants. This was the highest proportion of the global population registered in the last thirty years. The paper analyses some general aspects of international migration. There are detailed migration patterns in various regions such as America, Europe, the Asia-Pacific region, and Africa. Based on the data provided can be drawn some policy implications. Countries of destination should apply policies in order to facilitate the integration of migrants and should provide labour market regulations.*

*Keywords: international migration, America, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Africa*

*JEL classification: F22, Y10*

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## **1. Introduction**

It is necessary to make a differentiation between migration and migrants. Raymer & Willekens (2008) sustain that migration makes reference to the process of moving from one country to another, or from a region to another one. A migrant is an individual who changes his residential status at different times.

The term migrant covers a diverse group of individuals facing a range of situations and it's challenging to accurately count migrants and determine the duration of their staying abroad. Equally important as identifying when someone becomes a migrant is to identify when they stop to be one, which can occur through repatriation or acquiring citizenship in a new country (Koser, 2007).

Migration can be internal or international. Migration at the internal level is represented by the people's decision to move from rural zones to urban areas, from urban to rural, from rural to rural areas, or from urban to urban areas in the same country. On the other side, international migration is the movement of labour force from one country abroad.

Regarding international migrants there exists economic migrants, political migrants, and environmental migrants. Economic migrants are those people who usually live in poverty and who want to have a higher income. In this sense, they move abroad for the rest of their lives, or just for a temporary period. Those people who go to another country for a short period have the intention to save money in order to

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come back to their home country to invest their money in a new business, or to build a house. Moreover, there are migrants who are migrating seasonally, every year. They work mostly in agriculture (Hunter, 2011).

Political migrants include refugees who have been forced to move due to political reasons or conflict (Koser, 2007). Environmental migrants are those people who choose to leave when they are confronted with droughts, floods, sea level rise, and other disasters (Hunter, 2011).

We have to mention that international migration can be made legally or illegally. Illegal migrants refer to people who go to a country without the necessary documentation or with false documents, or those who came legally and their visa expired (Koser, 2007).

In the present research our focus turns to studying some general aspects of international migration. We propose to present some data on the flow of migration across the globe.

The structure of the study comprises some introductory aspects (the current section). It is followed by some general data and characteristics on international migration. Section 3 comes with data about migration from and to specific regions in the world. The last section present some conclusions.

## 2. International migration at a glance

In 2020 estimates showed that at the global level existed approximately 281 million people who migrated internationally. That means 3.59% of the total global population migrated at the international level. It is important to be noted that this is a small proportion of the world population that migrates abroad. People migrate more at the internal level, rather than internationally (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2022). In Table 1 we have the number of international migrants from 1990 to 2020.

**Table 1. International migrants from 1990 to 2020**

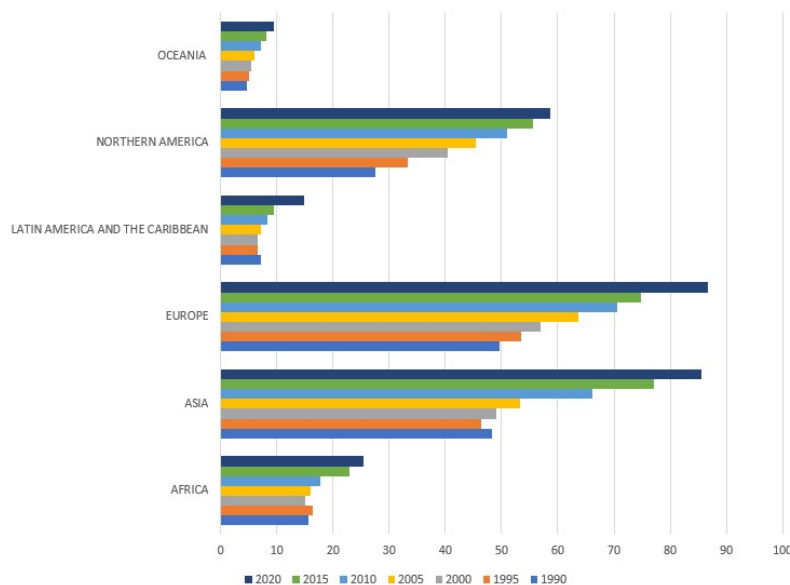
	International migrants	Migrants as a share of the world's population
1990	152986157	2.89
1995	161289976	2.82
2000	173230585	2.82
2005	191446828	2.92
2010	220983187	3.17
2015	247958644	3.35
2020	280598105	3.59

*Source:* Own processing based on data from United Nations, 2024.

The most important reasons why people migrate abroad are linked to finding a job, family reunion, or for education. At the same time, there exists people that are forced to migrate, mostly because of conflicts, persecution, or disasters.

When it comes to countries which receive the most international migrants we can see in Figure 1 that Europe is on the first place with 87 million migrants in 2020. It is followed by Asia which hosted 86 million migrants, also, in 2020. On the third place comes Northern America with 59 million migrants. In Africa were registered 25 million international migrants. In Latin America and the Caribbean there were 15 million migrants. Oceania hosted 9 million migrants. The same figure contains the evolution of international migrants between 1990 and 2020 in every region.

**Figure 1. International migrants by the destination region**



*Source:* Own processing based on data from United Nations, 2024

The implications of migration depend on whether a country is accepting immigrants or experiencing emigration. More precisely, if it is the country of destination or the origin country. United Nations sustain that migration have a positive effect on the origin country through the fact that it offers new jobs that are unavailable in their home country. Also, another positive effect is given by remittances sent home (money sent home by the migrants to their families). For example, in 2022 the highest level of remittances was received by India (111 billion USD).

The positive part of migration refers to enhanced flows of trade flow of trade between the country of destination and the origin country. Moreover, the origin country can benefit of people experience and new skills gained in the receiving country when they decide to come back home.

Of course, migration doesn't have only good parts for the origin country, it comes also with some negative aspects. One negative effect can be the brain drain, the emigration of high-skilled labour.

When it comes about the countries of destination one positive effect of migration is the influx of skilled labour and also of unskilled immigrants. Another positive effect is that migration contributes to population growth. Immigration can lead to economic growth in the receiving country through the demand for products and services made by immigrants and, also, by taxes paid by them. In the same time, more immigrants coming in a country of destination can generate also a negative effect through the fact that can increase the unemployment rate or take the place of work of resident people.

One negative part of immigration for the destination country can be the migrants' integration. But there exists two ways of integration: assimilation and multiculturalism. The first one refers to the adoption of culture, language and social norms of the receiving country. The second method consists in letting migrants not change their cultural norms (Bailey, 2010). There are societies which accept the migrant background: religion, cultural traditions, language. They see multiculturalism as an opportunity for cultural exchange.

Another negative aspect is that the immigrants take the jobs from the residents, because they accept to work for less money (Bailey, 2010). Usually, this kind of jobs are from the blue collars category, or jobs that require a lower qualification.

### **3. Stylized facts of global migration**

#### **Migration in America**

Starting with the initial discovery of America (1492) immigrants from all over the world were attracted to this destination. We begin by describing the migration to the United States. In the mid-nineteenth century, there were migrants from the North part of Europe. At the beginning of the twentieth century there were registered migrants from South and East Europe. The period post-1965 was marked by migrants from Latin America and Asia. And lately, there are also encountered migrants from Africa. Regarding migration according to gender, mostly men migrated until 1930. But, from 1990 more than fifty per cent of legal migrants were women (Arnold, 2012).

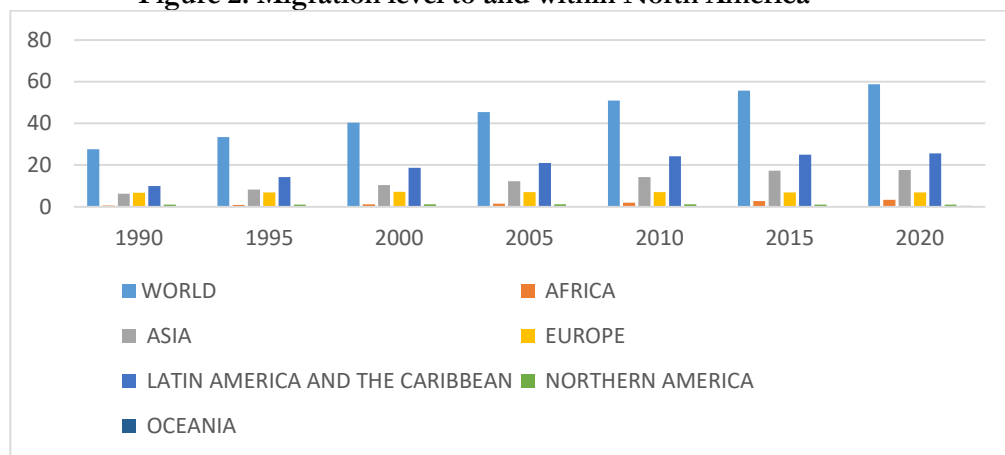
The United States is the most attractive destination for immigrants coming from all continents. However, a lot of migrants are coming from the country's neighbour, Mexico. People from Mexico are poor and there exists a continuous growth of the population. So, migration is a reasonable solution for them. In 2022 were registered approximately 5 million Mexican emigrants in the United States, being more than double since 1990, when were registered 2.3 million migrants (Anon., 2024).

Moving to Canada, this country has been in the second place as a destination for immigrants, right after the United States (Arnold, 2012). Immigrants who are coming nowadays in Canada are more educated than immigrants from the past and compared to Canadians are more probable to have a diploma of university. Nevertheless, foreign people encounter difficulties in finding jobs that are well-paid and, also, their income is much lower than those of Canadians.

The Caribbean islands are generators of migrants. People from these islands have established in South America, Central and North America, and also in Britain.

Regarding South America there exists a migratory movement of Latin Americans to the United States, and also to Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. In Argentina, there work approximately 200000 illegal migrants from Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru. Mexico represents a second option for migrants, and in the end they go to the United States. In the past (1980), Mexico was the principal country from Latin America which was generator of migrants for United States, nowadays all Latin American countries generate migrants to United States (Arnold, 2012).

**Figure 2. Migration level to and within North America**



*Source:* Own processing based on data from United Nations, 2024.

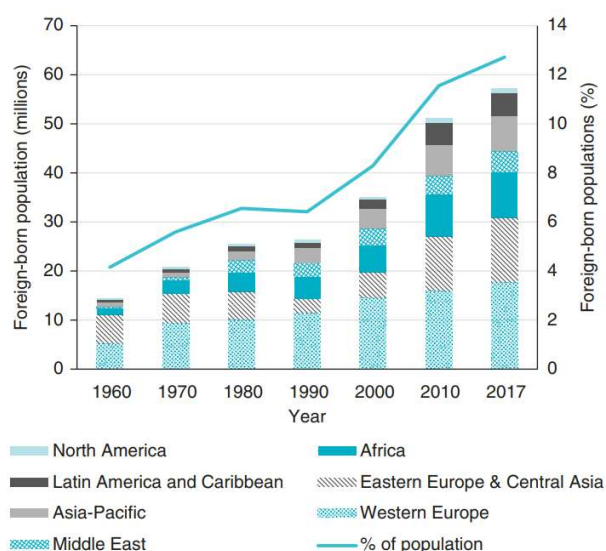
As we can see in Figure 2, in 2020 almost 59 million migrants were living in North America. This is an increase with approximately 3 million migrants from 2015, when

there were registered 56 million migrants. The year 2020 was marked by 26 million migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, 18 million from Asia, and 7 million from Europe.

### Migration in Europe

Between the years 1960 and 1970 it was a decline of the number of European migrants to the America and Oceania, and in the West part of Europe started to come a lot of migrants from all over the world. In Figure 3 we have the evolution of emigrants in Western Europe since 1960 to 2017.

**Figure 3. Foreign population in West part of Europe**



*Source:* De Haas et al. (2019), p. 119.

The migratory behaviour from the West part and the East part of Europe encountered changes due to the fall of Wall of Berlin in 1989, the disintegration of the Soviet union in 1991, the fall of communism in the Central and Eastern Europe, and the creation of the European Union.

The South part of Europe has become destination for migrants in the period 1989-2008, after being more than a century an important generator of migrants for the West part of Europe, North America, South America and Australia. Up to the 1970s, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece were generators of migrants. Due to economic growth, transitions made at demographic level and the quality of member of the European Union, the level of immigration decreased over time and the level of emigration increased (De Haas et al., 2019).

Due to crisis from 2008, countries from Central and Eastern Europe (Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) registered an increase of emigration. At the opposite, Poland experienced low levels of emigration, and increasing of immigration (through returning migration).

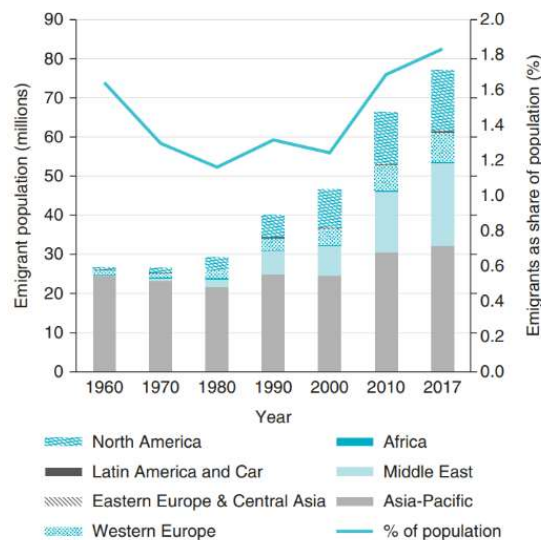
In the recession time some countries remained generator of migrants. For example, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine. Moreover, while there are some countries (Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Netherlands) where the trends of immigration were not been affected (De Haas et al., 2019).

In 2017 data from Eurostat show that 2.4 million migrants from outside the European Union settled in countries from European Union. The main destinations from Europe are: Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Italy. Each of them hosting in 2017 up to 6 million migrants. Also, the size of migration is high in Ukraine, Switzerland, Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, Belgium (De Haas et al., 2019).

### Migration in Asia-Pacific Region

Beginning with 1990, migration from Asia started to increase very fast. In Figure 4 we have the evolution of emigrants from Asia-Pacific from 1960 to 2017 (De Haas et al., 2019).

**Figure 4. Emigrants from Asia-Pacific by destination**



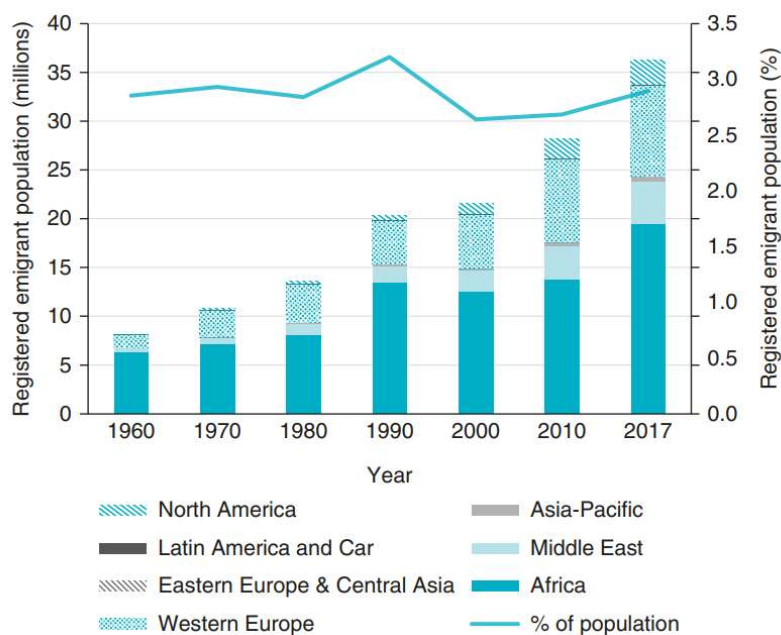
*Source:* De Haas et al. (2019), p. 174

Urbanization levels from Asia are greater than those from Europe or North America. Asia played an important role regarding the increase of global migration on long distances starting from 1960. Nowadays, people from Asia are equally probable to migrate in another region/country from Asia or to migrate outside of Asia. There are registered approximately 1.3 million people per year who are leaving Asia (Gold & Nawyn, 2019).

### Migration in Africa

In Africa, the level of emigration is relatively low, varying between 2.5% and 3% of the total population of Africa (De Haas et al., 2019). In Figure 5 we have the evolution of emigrants from Africa.

**Figure 5. Emigrants from Africa by destination**



*Source:* De Haas et al. (2019), p. 201.

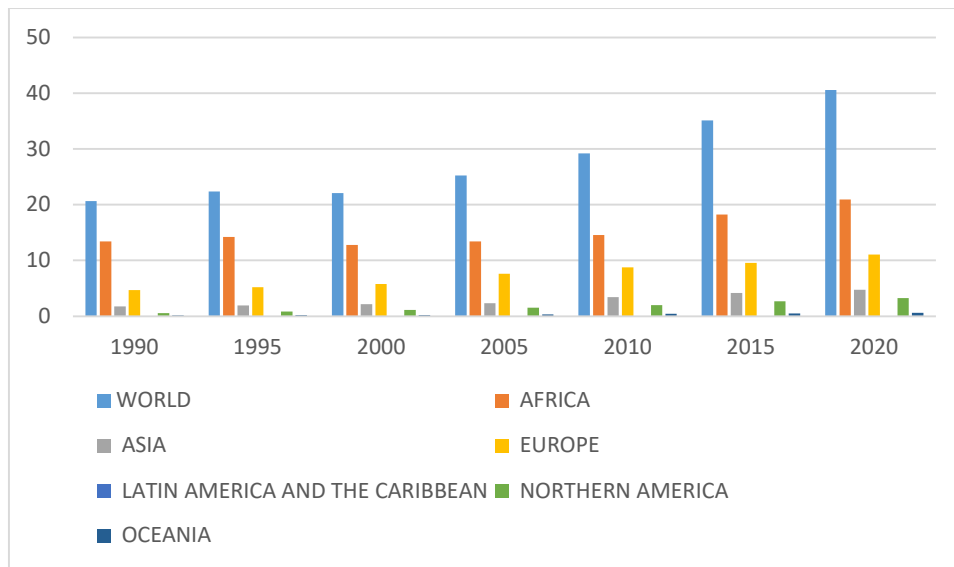
In 2020, approximately 21 million Africans migrated internally. This was an increase compared to the year 2015, when just 15 million Africans were displaced at the internal level. Also, in the same period of time (2015-2020) international migration increased from 17 million to 19.5 million.

Beginning with 1990 the number of migrants from Africa who live abroad has doubled. Most of the migrants have gone to Europe, 11 million migrants were



registered in 2020. In the same year, 5 million migrants were gone in Asia and 3 million migrants in Northern America (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Migration level to and from Africa in the interval of time 1990-2020**



*Source:* Own processing based on data from United Nations, 2024.

#### 4. Conclusions

Every country in the world has to face with migration, either it is an origin, transit, or destination country. This study provides a short overview of international migration patterns across various regions of the world such as: America, Europe, Asia-Pacific, and Africa. Europe, Asia, and Northern America which are the primary destinations for international migrants, hosting million migrants every year.

There can be drawn some policy implications. Destination countries should implement policies to facilitate the integration of migrants into society. These include providing language training, access to education and healthcare. Also, destination countries should enhance labour market regulations that protect both the migrants and native workers from unfair competition.

Origin countries can adopt similar strategies to mitigate the negative effects of migration. They should invest in education and create opportunities for skilled migrants who return home. For example, China is one country which adopted the policy of brain drain brain gain. They offered various incentives to people who studied or worked abroad if they come back to work in the origin country.

Moreover, origin countries should address the principal causes of emigration, such as economic instability, lack of opportunities, or bad governance.

International migration is a complex phenomenon that requires efforts from both the origin and the destination countries to manage and to decrease the negative aspects of migration.

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