

MIGRATION INFORMATION SOURCE
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Top 10 Migration Issues of 2008

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Issue #1 — "Buyer's Remorse" on Immigration Policy

Booming economies in the last decade created plenty of opportunities for immigrant workers, millions of whom flocked to Spain, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Australia, among other destinations.

Hungry for labor, Spain threw open its doors to legal migration in 2005 without giving much thought to how it would cope with migrants if economic circumstances changed. More than 800,000 foreigners moved to Spain in 2006 alone, with the foreign population standing at 4.5 million, or 10 percent of Spain's population, as of early 2007. Between 2005 and 2007, the proportion of foreign workers in the labor force rose from 8 percent to 12 percent.



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Immigrants sit on a bench along a busy shopping street in Madrid. More than 800,000 foreigners moved to Spain in 2006 alone.

The United Kingdom, by granting immediate labor-market access to nationals from the new European Union Member States in May 2004, effectively legalized hundreds of thousands Eastern Europeans already working there and allowed many more to follow. Polish nationals quickly became the largest immigrant group in the United Kingdom, growing over 700 percent from about 53,000 in early 2004 to 447,000 by the end of 2007, according to UK Labor Force Survey data.

The current economic downturn, however, has made many destination countries cautious about welcoming permanent migrants, with some expressing the policy equivalent of buyer's remorse: paying too high a price for something no longer desired. There are seeming exceptions, such as Sweden and Norway, each of which have experienced high immigration levels in the past three years but have not been overwhelmed.

The country with the most remorse is Spain, which attracted migrants from Latin America and North Africa and legalized about 560,000 of them in 2005, plus family members. Unemployment is at 11.3 percent (17.5 percent among foreigners), the construction industry is nearly at a stand-still, and the economy is shrinking.

After Prime Minister Luis Rodriguez Zapatero was reelected this year, he recognized the changing mood around immigration and brought in more of a hardliner as his new minister of employment and social affairs.

That minister, Celestino Corbacho, in June announced a voluntary return program that would give unemployed legally resident migrants from certain countries compensation for leaving Spain and agreeing not to return for three years.

Unsurprisingly, immigrant groups in Spain did not endorse the return program, which the government began implementing in September, and few migrants have taken the government up on its offer. Spain has warned that it will likely issue few new migrant visas in 2009.

Due to political pressure and the economic downturn, the United Kingdom in November cut back the originally planned number of "shortage occupation" visas, part of its new points system for bringing in skilled migrants, from 1 million to 800,000 (see **Issue #2: The Recession-Proof Race for Highly Skilled Migrants**). Importantly, the existence of such a list means that the United Kingdom will have greater ability to tailor immigration to its needs as those needs change — agility that is important in the rapidly evolving globalized economy.

Although the flow of migrants from new EU Member States, particularly Poland, has slowed, with some returning home (see **Issue #6: Return Migration: Changing Directions?**), British politicians face a public increasingly hostile toward immigrants and a system they perceive to be out of control.

Equality and Human Rights Commission Chair Trevor Phillips, in an October speech promoting the benefits of immigration *and* the need for control, acknowledged that such fear is legitimate. "I think we need to look out for the wife or partner with a young child," he said. "When she applies for work, is rejected for job after job in a slack labor market yet sees a clever young Latvian or Lithuanian with two degrees and three languages doing the job she'd like to do, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to work out how she'll feel."

Although Australia and New Zealand remain committed to attracting foreign students who can eventually become skilled migrants, leaders in both countries face pressure to cut immigration flows as well.

Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said in a radio interview in October, "As with all previous governments, and mine is the same, whenever we set immigration targets, we will adjust them according to economic circumstances of the day."

Helen Clark, who lost her reelection bid for prime minister in New Zealand's November elections, said in a campaign speech, "We have told Immigration that if there is the slightest sign of uptake, they are to get much tighter on permits."

However, Clark said the country's seasonal worker program, which brings workers from Pacific Island nations on a temporary basis, would not be stopped. This indicates that even as permanent migration channels are reconsidered, temporary migration channels for certain economic activities are likely to remain safe and could even be expanded.

Even Singapore, which has aggressively courted migrants and deems them essential to the country's prosperity, has seen tensions rise over foreign workers. So far, however, the government is not changing its rhetoric or its policy.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said during a recent dialogue with Malay grassroots leaders, "I think our interest is to protect the Singaporeans and look after the Singaporeans, but we must do it intelligently, we cannot just react and just do something without thinking."

See Also:

Features

- [Regularizing Immigrants in Spain: A New Approach](#)
- [Latin American Immigration to Southern Europe](#)
- [The Immigration Legacy of Tony Blair](#)
- [EU Enlargement and the Limits of Freedom](#)
- [How are the Costs and Impacts of Migration Policies Evaluated?](#)
- [Singapore: Hungry for Foreign Workers at All Skill Levels](#)

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- [European Immigration and the Labor Market](#)
- [Gaining from Migration: Towards a New Mobility System \(OECD report\)](#)

Issue #2 — The Recession-Proof Race for Highly Skilled Migrants

Advanced industrialized societies aren't always able to find within their own ranks all of the highly skilled workers essential to occupations ranging from mathematics to engineering and high-tech to the medical field.

And, although policymakers know that the long-term solution is to improve their educational and training systems, highly skilled immigrants present the best near-term solution to fill shortages and enhance competitiveness. That's why gloomy economic forecasts do not seem to have slowed the hunt for highly skilled migrants or foreign students, whose locally earned degrees and language skills make them an obvious talent pool.



The University of Melbourne offers guides for prospective students in multiple languages, including Chinese. Australia allows certain foreign graduates of its universities to settle in the country.

The European Union's proposed Blue Card, intended to attract high-skilled workers from outside the European Union, moved forward this fall, and EU ministers are expected to formally adopt the proposal in early 2009 after the Czech Republic assumes the EU presidency.

The Blue Card system will be implemented in 2011, on a slower timetable than expected, because the Czech Republic and other newer Member States were concerned about the Blue Card going into effect before they gain full access to labor markets across the European Union.

The United Kingdom has opted out of the Blue Card (as have Denmark and Ireland), preferring instead to rely on its new points system and a national-labor-market approach to managing migration.

Tier 1 of the UK points system — rolled out to applicants in India in April and to applicants worldwide in late July — targets the highly skilled but does not require applicants to have a job offer. The UK government has not yet reported the number of Tier 1 applications.

Tier 2, which grants permits to skilled workers who meet English language requirements and have job offers, went live at the end of November.

In addition, the new system allows foreign graduates of UK universities to stay in the country, look for a job, and transition to Tier 1 or Tier 2, rather than requiring them to leave. This approach is intended to make the United Kingdom as attractive as Australia, which implemented a student-to-skilled-worker scheme in 1999 that helped triple its number of foreign students. By 2002, former students constituted over 50 percent of Australia's skilled-migrant applications.

Both the United Kingdom and Australia ranked highly in a recent review of 17 countries' university systems by the Lisbon Council, in part because of their ability to attract foreign students. (The United States still has the largest number of foreign students worldwide, but Australia is not far behind).

Facing labor shortages in certain sectors, Sweden decided to court the highly skilled, particularly from India, by making its work-permit system more flexible starting in mid-December. No longer will government agencies decide if certain skills already exist in Sweden.

Instead, Sweden has decided that employers should drive the process of determining when a third-country national is necessary. Work permits will be valid for up to two years and renewable for up to four years, with the option of permanent residency at the four-year point. In addition, Sweden is allowing foreign students to apply for work permits while they are still in the country.

To make Canada more competitive in attracting and retaining skilled migrants, the Canadian government launched the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) in September. CEC grants permanent residence to certain temporary foreign workers and foreign graduates of Canadian universities who have Canadian work experience.

France has made increasing flows of highly skilled migrants a policy priority since revising its immigration laws in 2006. Its push continued this year, notably in Asia. France's ambassador to Singapore courted skilled workers there in a meeting with local journalists in October.

The idea that global powers are in a hotly contested race for highly skilled talent remains more anecdotal than evidence-based, since salaries for such workers have not increased dramatically.

Still, there are signs of competition. Witness the move this past summer by the Canadian province of Alberta to woo H-1B visa holders in the United States with the promise of faster permanent residency in Canada.

See Also:

Features

- [The Proposed European Blue Card System: Arming for the Global War for Talent?](#)
- [Selecting Economic Stream Immigrants through Points Systems](#)
- [The "Brain Gain" Race Begins with Foreign Students](#)
- [Australia's Continuing Transformation](#)
- [France's New Law: Control Immigration Flows, Court the Highly Skilled](#)

Policy Beats

- [USCIS Receives 163,000 H-1B Applications for Fiscal Year 2009 \(April 2008\)](#)
- [Senate Immigration Bill, Attacked from All Sides, Gains Second Chance \(June 2007\)](#)

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- [Uneven Progress: The Employment Pathways of Skilled Immigrants in the United States](#)
- [European Immigration and the Labor Market](#)
- [Proposed Points System and Its Likely Impact on Prospective Immigrants](#)
- [Gaining from Migration: Towards a New Mobility System \(OECD report\)](#)

Issue #3 — Remittance Patterns in Flux

Like housing values and stock markets, it once seemed as if the global value of remittances could only go up. Remittances to developing countries increased 18 percent in 2006 (\$229 billion in all) and 16 percent in 2007 (\$265 billion), according to World Bank estimates.

Remittances are widely considered an exceptionally stable source of development finance that actually increases when the economic climate sours in developing countries. The big question now is how they will fare when countries around the world are being pinched by outright recession or economic turmoil.

"We are in unknown territory now because both the source countries and the destination countries are not doing very well," World Bank Senior Economist Dilip Ratha said recently.

The data available for 2008 present a mixed picture. The World Bank reported in November that remittances for 2008 are expected to be about \$283 billion, a 7 percent increase. Flows from the gulf countries to South Asia have grown quickly in 2008; in contrast, flows from the United States to Latin America and the Caribbean and those from Western Europe to Europe and Central Asia have been slowing.

Kenya, the Philippines, Pakistan, and Bangladesh experienced double-digit growth in remittances in the first two or three quarters of 2008. El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic also saw remittance growth between 5 and 9 percent while Mexico had a 3.7 percent decrease.

But the average amount Mexican migrants in the United States send per transaction in 2008 (\$349) remains in the \$340-to-\$350 range that has been the norm since 2005.

Also, despite a drop in remittances in August, Mexico's central bank reported an increase in September compared to the same month in 2007. And with the dollar stronger against the peso, even if the average transaction is holding steady, it nonetheless is providing greater buying power in Mexico.

Manuel Orozco, director of remittances and development at the Inter-American Dialogue, gives a number of reasons why Mexico's experience differs from those of other Latin American countries. These include job losses in the United States (particularly in the construction sector), a large drop in cash savings, a higher number of deportations resulting partly from worksite raids, and increased use of informal and alternative money-transfer methods that the Central Bank of Mexico does not properly record.



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Migrants in Dubai wait in line to send money home. Remittance flows from the gulf countries to South Asia increased in 2008.

During the US recession of 2001-2002, remittances increased. The current recession, however, is expected to affect a larger number of developed countries and to be deeper and longer.

Ratha and his colleagues forecast that remittances as a share of GDP of the recipient countries will fall to 1.8 percent in 2008 from 2.0 percent in 2007. If realized, this would represent a remarkable turnaround in the growth trends of the past decade. The decline in remittances is expected to be short-lived, however, recovering to a growth rate of more than 6 percent by 2010.

And the outlook for 2009, once all factors are considered? A slowdown in remittances in general, with some countries feeling the pain more than others.

Yet other kinds of external financial flows, such as foreign investment in emerging stock markets and official development assistance from governments, are likely to slow even more. That means remittances could become more important to developing countries even as their absolute value declines.

See Also:

Features

- [South-South Migration and Remittances](#)
- [The Rise in Remittances to India: A Closer Look](#)
- [Latino Remittances Swell Despite US Economic Slump \(February 2003\)](#)
- [How Remittances Help Migrant Families](#)

MPI Data Hub

- [Global Remittances Guide](#)

MPI

- [Variable Impacts: State-level Analysis of the Slowdown of the Growth in Remittances to Mexico \(2007\)](#)
- [Leveraging Remittances for Development](#)
- [Remittances and Development: Trends, Impacts, and Policy Options -- A Review of the Literature](#)

Issue #4 — Immigration Ultimately Not an Issue in the 2008 Election

Immigration figured as a prominent subject in the United States' 2008 presidential primaries but was almost nonexistent in the general-election contest between Democrat Barack Obama and Republican John McCain.

A polarizing issue during congressional debates in 2006 and 2007, immigration had been anticipated to be a wedge issue in the 2008 elections, in large measure because of its expected power to energize both the conservative base and the Hispanic vote.



Steve Rhodes, flickr.com/ari

A multilingual sign directs voters to a polling place in the San Francisco area.

And, for a time, it surfaced during the Republican primaries as candidates Mitt Romney, Mike Huckabee, and Rudy Giuliani, in particular, vied to see who could sound toughest on illegal immigration. But the issue also proved its ability to sting, with Romney dogged by accusations that he employed unauthorized-immigrant landscapers at his house, and he and Giuliani accused of presiding over "sanctuary" cities.

In the Democratic primaries, the issues of immigration made its first noteworthy appearance when, during a debate in October 2007, Senator Hillary Clinton stumbled in her answer to a question about driver's licenses for unauthorized immigrants.

But the issue faded, swamped by greater public concern and candidate attention on the war in Iraq, rising energy prices, and health care. Its disappearance from the debate marked something of an unusual turn of events.

After all, millions of immigrants and their supporters turned out in the streets in cities across America in 2006 demanding legalization and opposing a House bill that would have criminalized illegal immigration. Also, immigration figured prominently in many 2006 congressional races, with Democrats reaching out to Hispanic voters alienated by the law-and-order, no-amnesty wing of the Republican Party, which was struggling to reconcile that same wing with proimmigration business interests.

Furthermore, immigrant-advocacy groups capitalized on the energy from the 2006 demonstrations by launching naturalization and voter-registration initiatives to make immigrant voters a factor in the 2008 election.

And in June 2007, for the second year in a row, the Senate failed to pass comprehensive immigration legislation amid sharp partisan divides and President Bush's inability to persuade members of his own party to back a major rewrite of immigration law.

McCain, the Arizona Republican — who coauthored the 2006 comprehensive reform bill with Democrat Ted Kennedy and cosponsored a similar bill in 2007 — suffered the wrath of his party's conservative base as his primary campaign foundered badly over immigration before recovering.

McCain recognized that anger and backed away from his support for the legislation, hammering instead on the importance of border enforcement.

McCain's nomination in early March arguably neutralized immigration as a campaign issue, and Obama's emergence as the Democratic nominee in June effectively put it to rest. Neither candidate had to use immigration as a differentiating point because they fundamentally agreed that comprehensive immigration reform was necessary. Press coverage shifted to the nominees' courting of Latino voters.

By mid-September, the economic crisis trumped all other issues as Americans became increasingly concerned with keeping their homes, jobs, and retirement funds.

Immigration was relegated to a bit role in the final months of the campaign, with McCain and Obama using the issue exclusively in Spanish-language media, running ads accusing the other of blocking comprehensive immigration reform.

Obama handily won the Latino vote: 67 percent of Hispanic voters supported Obama while only 31 percent voted for McCain, according to an exit-poll analysis by the Pew Hispanic Center. McCain's poor showing among Hispanics was largely attributed to the fact that other Republican politicians were seen as promoting anti-immigrant sentiment.

See Also:

Features

- [Hispanic Voter Attitudes and the 2008 Presidential Election](#)
- [Spotlight on Naturalization Trends in Advance of the 2008 Elections](#)
- [Latino and Asian Voters in the 2004 Election and Beyond](#)

Policy Beat

- [Hispanic Vote Goes for Obama But May Not Lead to Quick Action on Immigration Reform \(November 2008\)](#)
- [Party Platforms Discuss Immigration, But Candidates Scarcely Mention It \(September 2008\)](#)
- [New York Governor Abandons Driver's Licenses for the Unauthorized \(November 2007\)](#)

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- [Role of Foreign-born Voters in Elections](#)
- [Behind the Naturalization Backlog](#)

Issue #5 — Xenophobia Rising

Anger toward immigrants, refugees, and ethnic or religious minorities has persisted in pockets across the world since time immemorial, taking the form of riots, expulsions, political rhetoric, party candidates, protests, and crackdowns.

Unfortunately, 2008 brought a new wave of xenophobia, most notably in South Africa and Italy.

In South Africa, where antifoiegn sentiment has long simmered, the violence that caught the world's attention began in mid-May in the Johannesburg township of Alexandra, allegedly because of a series of robberies. Two immigrants were killed, at least 40 were injured, several women were raped, and about 100 immigrants sought safety at a local police station, according to media reports.



(c) Jason Boswell

A mother and child from the Democratic Republic of Congo moved to a refugee shelter after the xenophoic attacks in South Africa.

For poor South Africans, the idea of immigrants taking jobs, undercutting wages, committing crimes, and finding success as shopkeepers were justifications for the attacks. Before the month was over, South Africans had destroyed thousands of homes and immigrant-owned businesses, killing more than 60 people in all, including some South Africans.

An estimated 100,000 foreigners were displaced, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Among them were Somalis, Ethiopians, Congolese, Zimbabweans, and Mozambicans, many of whom had sought safety in South Africa after fleeing conflict in their homelands.

By the end of May, UNHCR reported some 42,000 migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, were sheltering at 95 makeshift sites. In August, as the South African government started closing temporary shelters, saying it was safe for foreigners to return to South African neighborhoods, UNHCR began repatriating those who preferred to go home.

"The locals made it clear that they don't want us back, and I will not put my family at risk. I may as well do that in the country of my birth," a man from the Democratic Republic of Congo told UNHCR of his decision to return home, where relative peace in his village has returned after years of civil war.

In Italy, stereotypes of Roma (an ethnic minority also called gypsies) as criminals had hardened in late 2007 after a Roma man was accused of brutally murdering an Italian woman.

Right-wing Italian politicians made crime and illegal immigration central themes of the 2008 parliamentary campaign although statistics show crime in Italy has not increased. The April elections doubled the strength of the anti-immigration Northern League in parliament, brought back Silvio Berlusconi as prime minister, and ushered in a right-wing mayor of Rome who promised during his campaign to boost

surveillance and deport 20,000 immigrants with criminal records.

In May, local residents set fire to Roma camps on the outskirts of Naples because of a 16-year-old Roma girl's attempt to kidnap an Italian baby. That same month, Italian police arrested nearly 400 people, most of them foreign citizens (Romanians and North Africans), and expelled 53 people, mostly Nigerians and Albanians, in a countrywide sweep.

The Italian government drew criticism from the European Parliament and human-rights organizations over the summer for its proposal to fingerprint all Roma, including children, in a census of Roma camps. The European Commission, however, said in September that the measure is not discriminatory.

Beyond Italy, Roma have been the target of attacks this fall in the Czech Republic. In November, 500 black-masked people attempted to attack a Roma ghetto in Litvinov, a town where unemployment is double the national average. The crowd clashed with police, and 14 people were injured.

Some fear xenophobia could rise in many countries in 2009 as economies continue to weaken, unemployment rises, and native-born populations see immigrants as competitors for jobs.

These sentiments are already present in many immigrant-destination countries.

According to a recent transatlantic survey funded by the US German Marshall Fund and other foundations, 65 percent of Americans and Britons said immigration will lead to higher taxes as a result of increased demand for social services by immigrants. Just over half of Americans (51 percent) and Britons (52 percent) thought that immigrants are currently taking jobs away from native-born workers.

And the majority in the United Kingdom (53 percent), Poland (53 percent), Germany (57 percent), the Netherlands (61 percent), and Italy (66 percent) agreed that immigration will increase crime.

See Also:

Features

- [South Africa: Policy in the Face of Xenophobia](#)
- [The Roma of Eastern Europe: Still Searching for Inclusion](#)
- [Debunking the Myth of Immigrant Criminality: Imprisonment Among First- and Second-Generation Young Men](#)
- [The People Perceived as a Threat to Security: Arab Americans Since September 11](#)
- [Trans-Saharan Migration to North Africa and the EU: Historical Roots and Current Trends](#)

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- [Gaining from Migration: Towards a New Mobility System \(OECD report\)](#)

Issue #6 — Return Migration: Changing Directions?

Immigration policymakers long accustomed to recruiting workers from abroad to fuel their economies suddenly faced a much different challenge in 2008. As the world's advanced industrial economies one by one slipped into recession, the prospect of return migration gained currency in immigrant-receiving states around the world.

In June, the European Union Parliament approved a directive encouraging unauthorized immigrants to voluntarily return to their countries of origin. In September, Spain's parliament authorized a program that effectively pays some unemployed immigrants to leave if they promise not to return to Spain for three years (see **Issue #1: "Buyer's Remorse" on Immigration Policy**).



Depending on the country of destination and the time frame considered, 20 to 50 percent of immigrants go home or move on to a third country within five years of their arrival.

The trend has even spread to traditional immigrant-receiving countries, such as the United States. In July, the US Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency launched a pilot program called Scheduled Departure that allowed some unauthorized immigrants to work with ICE to schedule their journey home. The program, however, attracted only a handful of participants and was promptly suspended.

Some reports suggest that the global economic slowdown will encourage migrants to return home. Malaysia's Human Resources Ministry said in October it is prepared to provide repatriation assistance for all Malaysian workers in Singapore who lose their jobs there.

In the United States, press reports of immigrants from Mexico or Central America returning home due to lost jobs have become more common, but there is as yet no statistical evidence of return (see [Ones to Watch in 2009](#)).

Some highly skilled temporary migrants in the United States and Europe may also face the prospect of return if their employers in the banking and finance sectors downsize or go bankrupt.

Flows to the United States appear to be slowing: the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) registered a net increase of just over 500,000 immigrants between 2006 and 2007 (from 37.5 to 38.1 million). That is well slower than the estimated 1 million net annual increase in the foreign-born population recorded between 2000 and 2006 by the ACS and other data sources.

Of course, a certain level of return migration occurs naturally. A recent study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) found that depending on the country of destination and the time frame considered, 20 to 50

percent of immigrants go home or move on to a third country within five years of their arrival.

Demographer Graeme Hugo estimates that about a fifth of all postwar permanent immigrants to Australia subsequently emigrate from Australia and that most of them return to their home countries.

More recently, an April 2008 analysis by the United Kingdom's Institute for Public Policy Research estimated that about half of the 1 million workers from the eight Eastern European states that joined the European Union in 2004 have left the United Kingdom and returned home.

The academic literature suggests that return migration results from both failure and success. Some migrants may decide to return because they fail to integrate or advance in the host-country society or simply cannot find jobs.

However, most research indicates that large-scale return migration corresponds more to political and economic conditions in the origin country. Migrants may be motivated to return by the prospect of new opportunities at home or because they have achieved their financial goals.

At the same time, they may choose not to return because of poor economic conditions at home. Also, money earned in the destination country — which those at home depend on — may give them reason to stay.

That said, having the right to return when economic circumstances change could be an incentive to leave now.

Overall, tracking return migration remains tricky from a technical standpoint. The United States officially stopped tracking the emigration rate of the foreign born in 1957.

Few countries (with the notable exception of Australia) have invested in the longitudinal data systems necessary to distinguish short-term from long-term departure and to identify the destinations of emigrants.

In many established migration corridors between developed and developing countries — such as between Mexico and the United States, Europe and North Africa, and the Philippines and the Middle East — return often occurs at the end of the migrants' life cycle as they prepare to retire.

However, Hugo's recent research on migration flows between Australia and India and China suggests that return migrants are increasingly young and skilled individuals in their working prime. It is not yet clear if this trend is applicable to other countries, but if it appears elsewhere, it could mean new competition in the race for skilled workers (see **Issue #2: The Recession-Proof Race for Highly Skilled Migrants**).

See Also:

Features

- [Secondary Migration: Who Re-Migrates and Why These Migrants Matter](#)
- [Linking Temporary Worker Schemes with Development](#)
- [Labor Export as Government Policy: The Case of the Philippines](#)

Policy Beat

- [Unauthorized Immigration Declining, But Experts Disagree on Why \(October 2008\)](#)
- [Government Self-Deportation Program Attracts More Criticism Than Immigrants \(August 2008\)](#)

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- [Managing Temporary Migration: Lessons from the Philippine Model](#)
- [Learning by Doing: Experiences of Circular Migration](#)

Issue #7 — Demography and Migration Flows: Do Shrinking Populations Mean More Migrants?

Confronted with the inescapable reality that the workforce in much of the developed world is graying rapidly, policymakers are beginning to take the increasingly stark demographic landscape more seriously.

While these governments acknowledge immigration is not the sole answer and that other measures, such as raising the retirement age or enticing more women into the labor force, would help alleviate the strain, they are considering immigration as a means to inject much-needed youthful labor into their aging workforces.

One example of greater openness to immigration is Japan, which has long resisted opening its borders to immigrants despite its rapidly aging population.

In June, members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) issued a bold report that calls for Japan to make foreign residents 10 percent of the nation's population — meaning an additional 10 million-plus people — in the next half century, up from less than 2 percent currently.

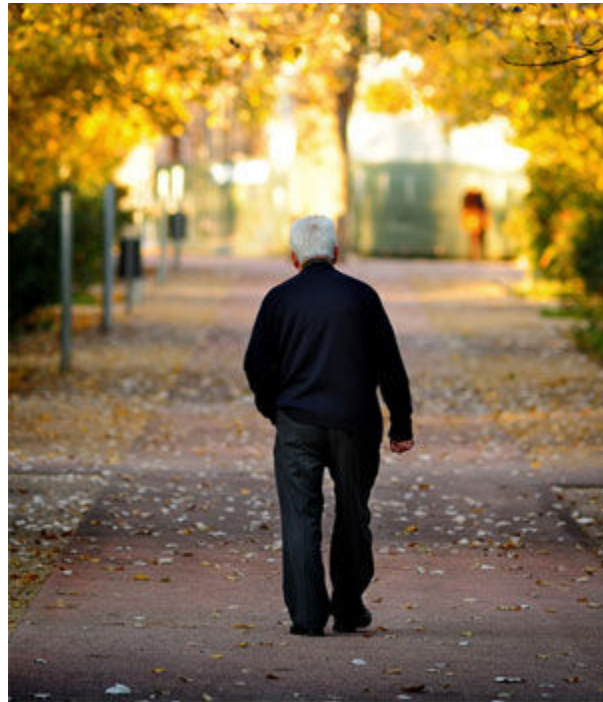
According to media reports, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda is taking the report seriously though he said that overcoming Japan's preference for exclusivity will be the main challenge to establishing a new immigration system.

The report also recommends that Japan aim to have 1 million foreign students in the country by 2025, an acknowledgment that foreign students can be an important source of skilled workers.

Japan already is taking small steps toward increased immigration. After receiving parliamentary approval in May, the government admitted 200 health-care workers from Indonesia as part of an economic partnership agreement between the two countries that will eventually bring 1,000 such workers: 600 nurses and 400 caregivers for the elderly.

This is the first time Japan has allowed a large number of foreigners to work in hospitals and nursing homes, according to Japanese media.

Demographic pressures have also factored into new labor migration policies in Norway and Sweden. Norway is considering a more user-friendly process for recruiting highly skilled immigrants, while Sweden has just launched a new, entirely employer-driven system for issuing needed work permits (see **Issue #2: The**



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Graying populations have led governments to consider immigration as a solution to their aging workforces.

Recession-Proof Race for Highly Skilled Migrants).

Tobias Billstrom, Sweden's minister for migration and asylum policy, carefully articulated Sweden's position in a government brochure:

"I do not believe that increased labor immigration is the only appropriate response to the demographic challenges we are facing," Billstrom wrote. "More labor immigration is only one of several instruments in efforts to prevent labor shortages and to maintain the supply of labor in the short and long term."

One of the provisions of the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum also signals the first-ever intergovernmental political decision to address labor shortages partly through migration. The pact's introduction states, "[International migration] can contribute decisively to the economic growth of the European Union and of those Member States which need migrants because of the state of their labor markets or of their demography."

The pact, which seeks to harmonize several aspects of immigration policy across the European Union while maintaining Member States' sovereignty, received the approval of the 27 Member States this fall. It encourages Member States to implement labor-migration policies, but many have yet to make substantial commitments to step up employment flows.

At the EU level, Moldova and Cape Verde signed on as pilot countries for mobility partnerships to facilitate legal migration and control illegal migration (see **Issue #9: Warming up to Circular Migration?**).

The European Union also took a small step forward with Asia in April, when it convened a labor migration meeting in Brussels that included officials from 10 Asian countries, including India and the Philippines, and 16 EU Member States.

In contrast to Europe, South Asia and some parts of Southeast Asia are experiencing rapid population growth.

Participants called for continued dialogue at the ministerial level. They also agreed "there are mutual benefits to strengthening cooperation on the issue of migration flows from Asia to Europe especially in light of the demographic and economic dynamics that characterize both regions," according to the meeting summary.

See Also:

Features

- [Japanese Immigration Policy: Responding to Conflicting Pressures](#)
- [Sweden: Restrictive Immigration Policy and Multiculturalism](#)
- [The Proposed European Blue Card System: Arming for the Global War for Talent?](#)
- [With Strict Policies in Place, Dutch Discourse on Integration Becomes More Inclusive](#)

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- [European Immigration and the Labor Market](#)
- [Gaining from Migration: Towards a New Mobility System \(OECD report\)](#)

Issue #8 — Building Border Fences

Fences to protect the people of one country from another abound: Malaysia and Thailand have built fencing on either side of their border, Kuwait constructed fencing and trenches along the border with Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War, and Spanish enclaves in Morocco are heavily secured.



Border fences are often viewed as a harsh symbol in neighboring countries.

Although fences can be politically popular in the nations that build them, they are often viewed as a harsh (and expensive) symbol in neighboring countries. They are also far from foolproof in deterring would-be migrants.

Yet, in 2008, beefing up or constructing new fencing to keep out unauthorized migrants, cross-border terrorists and insurgents, and smugglers remained a priority in various parts of the world.

The increase in border fencing signals a climate of fear and highlights the inability or unwillingness of neighboring states to cooperatively deal with what are really joint problems that trouble both sides of the border.

Vexed by rising illegal immigration rates, the United States has built 216 miles of fencing and another 154 miles of vehicle barriers along the Southwest border, moving closer to achieving the Bush administration's goal of erecting 370 miles of fencing and 300 miles of vehicle barriers by year's end.

Rising construction costs and legal battles over land acquisition have complicated the completion of Congress's mandate in the Secure Fence Act of 2006 to build 700 miles of double-layered fencing along the US-Mexico border.

US Customs and Border Protection has also confronted delays in building the "virtual" fence, part of the Secure Borders Initiative, which uses radars, cameras, and sensors to detect illegal crossings. Difficulties during the pilot testing of a 28-mile "virtual" fence segment in Arizona raised questions earlier this year about the government's ability to deploy such fencing across vast swaths of the southern and northern borders.

The United States is not alone in using fencing as a mechanism to deter the movement of people.

Israel planned to build a fence along its rugged desert border with Egypt back in 2005 when it decided to pull out of the Gaza strip. But the financial costs were deemed too high.

It took a security crisis earlier this year — the temporary breach of the Gaza-Egypt border, when thousands left Gaza unchecked — before Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Olmert said Israel would build an 85-kilometer fence within two years.

India also invested in its border security this year, announcing in September that it plans to add 509 border outposts on the borders with Bangladesh and Pakistan, most of them on the Bangladesh border, which already has 802 such outposts.

Work on the India-Bangladesh border fence of multilayered barbed wire dates back to 1994 and was originally planned to be completed by 2007. A main reason for building it was keeping out migrants from Bangladesh.

However, attacks this fall in Assam, an Indian state tucked between Bangladesh and Bhutan where ethnic tensions are high, and tribal insurgents in the Indian state of Tripura have given new urgency to the project. Thus far, the Indian government has built 2,590 kilometers of fencing along the 4,097-kilometer Bangladeshi border — about 60 percent complete.

See Also:

Features

- [Immigration Enforcement in the United States](#)
- [From Horseback to High-Tech: US Border Enforcement](#)
- [Morocco: From Emigration Country to Africa's Migration Passage to Europe](#)

Policy Beats

- [Virtual Border Fence Given Mixed Assessment in First Test \(March 2008\)](#)
- [House Calls for Tighter Internal Enforcement and Border Fence, USCIS Claims to Meet Backlog Reduction Deadline \(October 2006\)](#)

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- [Countering Terrorist Mobility: Shaping an Operational Strategy](#)

Issue #9 — Warming up to Circular Migration?

Long before modern nation states regulated migration, movement between two places, often for seasonal work, was an established human behavior.

This concept, known as circular migration, today means a continuing, long-term, and fluid pattern of international mobility that can exist naturally (where national borders are open or not heavily enforced) or with government involvement (typically a bilateral agreement). A person with citizenship in two or more countries can easily move among them without restriction.

Circular migration has become a standard policy tool for certain gulf countries and East Asian economies that need low-skilled foreign labor but do not want workers to settle permanently. After working in Saudi Arabia on a two-year contract, for example, a construction worker from Pakistan must return home before he is allowed to return for another two-year contract. The worker cannot bring his family and stands little chance of becoming a Saudi citizen.

However, circular migration programs do not have to be so restrictive. Western developed countries struggling with labor shortages and aging societies (see **Issue #7: Demography and Migration Flows: Do Shrinking Populations Mean More Migrants?**) in some cases are slowly warming up to the idea of circular migration programs that go beyond the traditional temporary-worker programs of the mid-20th century. Those programs often led to permanent settlement.

Newer circular migration programs, such as those in Spain's agricultural sector, protect migrants' rights while in the host country and also seek to ensure they build their skills while abroad and use them when they return home.

Spain has successfully encouraged circular migration by requiring returning temporary workers to register with the Spanish consulates or embassy in their home country. The reward: access to permanent residency after four years of compliance.

The European Union moved ahead with its first "mobility partnerships," announced last year, by setting up pilot programs in June with Moldova and Cape Verde. Mobility partnerships seek to discourage illegal immigration in exchange for legal migration opportunities and short-term visas. Both pilots seek to facilitate circular migration, though details have not yet been announced.

Three Canadian provinces — British Columbia, Manitoba, and Alberta — signed memoranda of understanding with the Philippines this year to allow for temporary migration of overseas Filipino workers of varying skill levels. British Columbia, for instance, is eager to recruit workers who can staff the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver.



Vancouver, British Columbia, which will host the 2010 Winter Olympics, needs workers. The province has signed an agreement with the Philippines to bring over Filipino workers that protects their rights and welfare in Canada and encourages Canadian employers to support their reintegration in the Philippines.

The agreements are based on Canada's existing Temporary Foreign Worker program, which permits migrants to renew their work permits but does not automatically allow for back-and-forth movement. Still, the agreements include provisions important to circular migration: they protect Filipino workers' rights and welfare in Canada and encourage Canadian employers to support their reintegration in the Philippines. For the Philippine government, Canada is an attractive partner because it promises more protections for workers than gulf countries.

See Also:

Features

- [Linking Temporary Worker Schemes with Development](#)
- [Canada's Temporary Migration Program: A Model Despite Flaws](#)

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- [Learning by Doing: Experiences of Circular Migration](#)
- [Managing Temporary Migration: Lessons from the Philippine Model](#)

Issue #10 — Struggles of Iraqi Refugees Continue

More than five years after the United States invaded Iraq, an estimated 4.7 million Iraqis remain displaced either internally or in neighboring countries (about 1 million of them were displaced before the 2003 US invasion). They face increasingly dire circumstances due to higher food prices, dwindling savings, and few work opportunities.

In August, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that between 1 million and 1.5 million Iraqi refugees were residing in Syria, 450,000 to 500,000 in Jordan, and 50,000 in Lebanon. In addition, it reported in September that 1.6 million Iraqis had been internally displaced since February 2006, when the bombing of a mosque in Samarra killed tens of thousands and ignited sectarian violence.

UNHCR also reported that Iraq continued to be the leading source of asylum applicants worldwide in the first half of 2008, a rank Iraq has held since 2006.

Although the 19,500 asylum claims represent a 10 percent decrease over the first half of 2007 (when 21,400 petitions were filed), Iraqis filed twice as many claims as people from the Russian Federation, the second-largest source country for asylum seekers. One in five applications (3,900) was submitted in Sweden, which still attracts the most Iraqi asylum seekers. The next-largest recipients were Germany (3,400), Turkey (2,700), and the Netherlands (2,400).

In the long term, observers agree that the only practical solution for most Iraqi refugees is to go home rather than be resettled to a third country or settle permanently where they are now.

It seems clear, however, that repatriation will not happen quickly. At the end of 2008, most Iraqis appear unwilling to return home, although a few thousand reportedly did so in late 2007.

The Iraqi government sponsored the return of 250 refugees in August 2008. But in early October, the Iraqi Embassy in Damascus, Syria, had few takers for its offer of plane tickets and \$1,800 in cash to return home, according to media reports.

In fact, most nongovernmental and refugee organizations believe Iraqis in the region should stay put because Iraq is still too violent, despite some security gains. In addition, the pace of postwar reconstruction has been slow: many Iraqi cities lack utilities, schools, health care, other basic services, and job opportunities. Because of massive internal displacement, some families may find that others have occupied their homes.

New registrations with UNHCR have slowed since the peak in September 2007, but it is not clear what this means — fewer refugees in need or fewer who consider it worth the trouble to register.



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Iraqi refugees entering Syria line up to have their visas checked at the immigration center.

The United States expanded its capacity to process refugees in the region, including in Iraq, which enabled it to resettle 13,823 Iraqis by September 30, 15 percent more than its goal of 12,000.

The United States also created a special immigrant visa category for Iraqis who worked for the US government or US contractors; 5,000 such visas are available annually for the next five years, and visa-holders will be able to bring their families with them.

Nongovernmental and refugee organizations welcomed this news and the US goal of resettling at least 17,000 Iraqi refugees in 2009.

But they insist that the United States, Iraq, and the international community must better support Syria, Jordan (which made an appeal in late November), and other countries that have felt the strain of a large — and not entirely welcome — refugee population.

See Also:

Features

- [Spotlight on Refugees and Asylees in the United States](#)
- [Refugee Resettlement in Metropolitan America](#)

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- [The Iraqi Refugee Crisis: The Need for Action](#)

Ones to Watch in 2009

Economy's Effect on Migration

Without question, the seismic changes in the global economy will affect migration patterns, but evidence of those changes does not yet exist. Extreme caution is necessary in analyzing current statistics. For instance, Mexico's national statistical institute INEGI reported in November that emigration rates dropped from 14.6 per 1,000 in May 2006 to 8.4 per 1,000 in May 2008. We cannot know the exact role that the US recession may have played in this decrease.



There is no evidence yet that changes in the global economy have affected migration patterns.

One thing, however, is clear: policymakers will need to adapt to the rapidly shifting needs of their labor markets as jobs become scarcer. At the same time, immigrants who can adjust to the labor market will be able to improve their employment outcomes.

US Immigration Reform: Likely in 2009?

Although President-elect Barack Obama easily won the Hispanic vote (see **Issue #4: Immigration Ultimately Not an Issue in the 2008 Election**) and Democrats gained larger majorities in Congress, it will still be extremely difficult to enact large-scale immigration reform. The fiscal crisis and its economic consequences will clearly be the Obama administration's first priority, with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and health-care reform also high on the to-do list.

And though Democrats are well aware that immigration reform is a top concern for Latinos, the issue is certain to create rifts in the Democratic Party. That suggests congressional leaders and the new administration may be reluctant to tackle it in the near term.

Still, Obama is giving all signs that he intends to push immigration reform forward, most notably with his selection of Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano, who is a strong backer of a comprehensive immigration reform bill, to head the Department of Homeland Security.

About the Source

The Migration Information Source provides fresh thought, authoritative data from numerous global organizations and governments, and global analysis of international migration and refugee trends. A unique, online resource, the Source offers useful tools, vital data, and essential facts on the movement of people worldwide.

Working with a team of international correspondents, we chronicle global migration movements, provide perspectives on current migration debates, and offer the tools and data from numerous global organizations and governments needed to understand migration. We do this in a way that is accessible to researchers, policy makers, journalists, and other opinion shapers.

Our advisory board and other prominent migration scholars who contribute to The Source include some of the most respected voices in the migration and refugee fields. The Source also relies on the good will of several global organizations and governments who make their data and research publicly available on our site.

The Migration Information Source is a project of the [Migration Policy Institute](#).

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