

THE IN A HURRY SERIES

Immigration

in a Hurry

The movement that made the modern world

Max Brocklesby

BOOKSINAHURRY.COM

Contents

The Whole Thing in One Page 4

Why You Should Care 5

The Core Ideas 7

How It Actually Works 21

What People Get Wrong 31

Use It 36

Terms 41

Go Deeper 45

Notes and Sources 47

Bibliography 59

The Whole Thing in One Page

Immigration arrives in public life as a photograph of a border: a boat, a fence, a passport queue, people standing where one country ends and another begins. That is the most visible minute of a process that can last three generations. Before somebody reaches the line, a wage gap has opened, a war has started, a relative has sent money, an employer has recruited, a university has admitted, or a family has decided that one member should go first. After the crossing come work, housing, language, documents, children and the harder question of belonging.

People have always moved. Immigration in its modern administrative sense is newer. It exists when a territorial state claims the right to sort movers into citizens and foreigners, invited workers and unwanted entrants, refugees and people with no recognised claim. A herder crossing seasonal pastures was mobile. A nineteenth-century labourer carrying a contract across an ocean entered an emerging migration system. A modern passenger changes category when a database accepts one visa code and rejects another. Movement is human. Immigration is movement processed by a state.

The urge to move begins with difference: in earnings, safety, freedom, family life or the chance to learn. Difference alone explains little. Most people stay, and the poorest are often least able to leave. Travel costs money, information and nerve. Migrants are therefore selected. They tend to be people who can imagine another life and reach it.

Then routes begin to remember. The first mover faces uncertainty. The next may have an address, a loan, a job lead and somebody to meet them. Families distribute risk across countries. Recruiters, smugglers, employers and officials enter the route. What began as an individual decision becomes an institution made of relationships.

The state attaches rights to the result. A student may work a limited number of hours. A tied worker may be unable to change employer. An asylum-seeker waits while a claim is judged. A recognised refugee has

protections that an irregular migrant does not. These are legal distinctions, but they enter wages, bargaining power, exposure to abuse and the ordinary confidence to call the police.

History was made through every form of movement, and the forms must not be confused. Settlers seized land. Empires transported labour. Slave ships carried captive Africans across the Atlantic in an act of forced migration that was the opposite of a free choice. Steamships and railways then moved Europeans across the Atlantic while comparable streams of Indians, Chinese, Russians and other Asians remade ports, plantations and frontiers elsewhere. Modern states responded by building passports, racial exclusions, quotas and refugee categories.

Arrival did not finish any of it. Temporary workers stayed because firms wanted trained labour and families do not rotate like machinery. Children entered schools, accents changed, neighbourhoods formed, remittances returned and political arguments hardened. Immigration altered both the place left and the place entered. Those changes then altered the rules, which shaped the next journey.

The movement made the modern world because it carried workers, skills, coerced populations and family life across political lines, then forced states to decide who could share the result. The traveller crosses once. The societies at both ends keep answering what that crossing permits.

That is the book.

Why You Should Care

Open a hospital rota, walk through a building site, look behind a restaurant kitchen, enter a research laboratory or ask who is caring for an elderly parent. The modern economy has arranged work across borders so thoroughly that immigration can be present without looking foreign. A patient sees a nurse. A customer sees a delivery. A company sees a vacancy filled. The migration system sits behind the encounter, invisible until politics switches the light on.

That invisibility creates bad arguments. People speak about immigrants as though the word identifies one population with one motive and one effect. It may refer to a surgeon recruited abroad, a spouse joining a citizen, a student who leaves after a degree, a farm worker tied to a seasonal contract, a person awaiting an asylum decision, a refugee who cannot safely return, or somebody whose permission expired while their life remained in place. Add them together and the total may answer an accounting question. It does not answer what should happen next.

The scale is large and easy to misread. The United Nations estimated that about 304 million people lived outside their country of birth in 2024. That is more people than at any earlier count, and about 3.7 per cent of humanity. Both facts matter. The first explains why migration is woven through cities, labour markets and families. The second corrects the impression that the world is emptying into a few rich countries. Most people still live in the country where they were born, and much movement never crosses an international border.

Forced displacement is another population again. At the end of 2025, the United Nations refugee agency counted 117.8 million people forcibly displaced by persecution, conflict, violence or serious disorder. Most were displaced within their own countries. Among refugees and other people needing international protection, 65 per cent were hosted in neighbouring states, and 68 per cent were in low- or middle-income countries. The familiar picture of movement towards wealthy Western states is real. It is not the centre of the global refugee map.

You should care because category errors become human outcomes. Confusing a refugee with every migrant weakens both migration policy and refugee protection. Treating all workers as interchangeable hides where employers gain power from a person's insecure status. Looking only at national averages misses a school, clinic or rental market absorbing rapid local change. Looking only at local pressure misses taxes paid, firms created, relatives supported abroad and labour supplied where demand exists. A serious account has to hold scale and distribution together.

The subject also exposes what a country thinks membership is for. A state may welcome labour while withholding permanence, admit family while restricting work, or promise equal citizenship while allowing documents to decide who can rent and who can prove a life already lived. Immigration policy is therefore labour policy, family policy and constitutional self-description, joined in one file.

There is a personal reason too. Many family stories become migration stories when followed far enough, though the moral is not that all movements are alike. Some ancestors chose, some were recruited, some fled, some conquered, and some were transported in chains. The modern world was built by movement and by the unequal power to name one arrival settlement, another invasion, another return and another illegality.

This book will not tell you that immigration is good or bad. That sentence is too blunt to survive contact with the subject. It will give you the machine: what starts movement, who can act, how routes grow, how states attach rights, where gains and costs land, why temporary systems settle, and how the children of migrants change the question. Once you can see those stages, political claims become testable rather than tribal.

The border is where the camera waits. The consequential work happens before it and long after it.

The Core Ideas

The Unequal Map

People move because places differ. That sounds obvious until the differences are named. The same hour of work can command radically different pay in two countries. One passport can make routine travel easy while another turns each destination into an application. A marriage may be recognised on one side of a line and punished on the other. A university place, a safe street, clean water, religious freedom or the presence of one particular person can make distance look smaller than staying.

The usual language divides causes into pushes and pulls. War pushes; jobs pull. It sketches; it does not explain. The same person can be moved by danger, ambition and family duty at once. A construction worker may leave because earnings have collapsed, because a cousin has found work abroad and because school fees are due. A student may intend to return, discover a career, form a relationship and stay. Motives change during the journey, which is one reason legal categories never map perfectly onto human lives.

Difference creates potential movement, not movement itself. Large gaps can persist for generations with little migration between two places. The route may be too expensive, the visa unavailable, the language unknown or the destination connected to somebody else. Meanwhile people may move between countries with smaller economic gaps because an old colonial link, recruitment programme or family network has made the journey legible.

The household matters as much as the individual. In many settings, one person moves with money gathered from several relatives. The aim may be to spread risk, not maximise one wage. If harvests fail at home, earnings abroad still arrive. If work abroad disappears, land or family support remains at home. Remittances are therefore more than money sent by a successful individual. They are often the return on a collective decision made under uncertainty.

This makes the clean line between economic migrant and forced migrant harder to draw in ordinary life than it is in law. Refugee law needs a definition because protection cannot operate without one. Yet a family leaving a region affected by armed violence, drought, debt and political discrimination may not experience those forces separately. One person qualifies for refugee status; a neighbour fleeing the same collapse may not. The distinction can be legally necessary without becoming a complete sociology of why either moved.

Nor is movement always an expression of freedom. Expulsion, trafficking, enslavement and deportation move people by removing choice. Colonial governments recruited or compelled labour across empires. Armies emptied districts. Slave traders converted human beings into cargo. These histories

belong inside the story of world-making movement and outside any account that treats immigration as a voluntary search for a better wage.

Environmental change fits the same model. A flood can destroy a home overnight, while a slow loss of crops may first produce seasonal work in a nearby city. Climate pressure interacts with land rights, insurance, conflict, public investment and the money needed to leave. Calling all resulting movers climate migrants can hide more than it explains.

The first rule, then, is to resist one-cause stories. Movement begins where differences become imaginable, urgent and reachable. The map supplies the gap. A person, family, employer, army or state supplies the force that crosses it.

Movement Requires the Means

A common image has misery at one end of the route and departure at the other, as though hardship itself generates a ticket. Often it does the reverse. The poorest person may lack the fare, passport, health, information, freedom or contact needed to leave. A border can separate not those who want to move from those who do not, but those who can convert a wish into a journey from those who cannot.

Migration researchers describe this as the relation between aspirations and capabilities. Aspiration is the wish to change where one lives. Capability is the practical power to do it. Economic development can raise both. Education reveals alternatives, transport improves, income rises and communication makes distant wages visible. Development in a poor country need not reduce emigration at once. It may give more people the means to go. The pattern is not a universal migration hump with a fixed shape; politics, demography and existing routes can reverse it. The durable insight is narrower: poverty and mobility do not rise and fall in a straight line.

Selection follows. International migrants are rarely a random sample of the place they leave. They are selected by age, health, education, wealth, family position, appetite for risk and access to documents. Destination policies add another filter by admitting particular qualifications, relatives, nationalities or

incomes. Employers select again. The people who arrive can therefore differ from people at home and workers at destination.

That matters whenever outcomes are compared. If migrants earn more after moving, part of the difference may come from the new labour market and part from who was able to move. If a migrant group has high business formation, the cause may include legal barriers to ordinary employment, concentrated networks or unusually selected ambition. If health looks better on arrival and worse later, selection, working conditions and return migration may all affect the pattern. The journey has already sorted the population before any policy claims success or failure.

Forced movement changes the selection mechanism. When violence empties a town, people may flee with little preparation and lose assets on the route. Even then, capability shapes distance. Those with transport, documents and contacts may cross an international border; others may move to the nearest safer district; some remain trapped. Refugee populations in distant rich states are therefore not a direct photograph of everyone exposed to the conflict.

States frequently prefer selected migrants while speaking as though selection is a neutral discovery. Points systems reward qualifications, salaries or age. Student routes admit those who can pay and secure a place. Family rules recognise some relationships and not others. Even humanitarian corridors select by location, eligibility and administrative reach. Every route contains a theory of whose movement is useful, tolerable or deserving.

Capability is also distributed within households. A young man may be financed because relatives expect higher earnings from him, while a woman with the same ambition is held back by care duties or restrictions on independent travel. Selection can reproduce power at home even when movement expands opportunity abroad.

There is a second freedom hidden here: the ability to stay. A person who remains because work, safety and family are available is not immobile in the

same sense as somebody trapped by poverty or law. Good policy cannot be reduced to making migration easier or harder. It should enlarge the capacity to choose without pretending that every choice is made on equal ground.

Routes Remember

The first person on a route faces a blank page. They need to know whether work exists, what the journey costs, where to sleep, which papers matter and whom to trust. The second person may know all of that. A migration route is built when private knowledge becomes shared infrastructure.

Family and community networks lower the cost of movement. A relative can advance the fare, provide an address, explain an application, introduce an employer and translate the first encounter with a landlord. None of these acts guarantees success. Together they turn an unknown destination into a sequence of manageable steps. This is why migration often clusters by origin and destination. The question is not why one nationality prefers one city by instinct. It is which earlier movements made that city easier to reach.

The route then acquires professionals. Recruiters match workers to farms, ships, hospitals or construction sites. Travel agents assemble documents. Money-transfer firms carry earnings home. Lawyers and charities interpret status. Smugglers sell passage where authorised routes are closed or inaccessible. Traffickers use coercion and deception to control people for profit. Those roles must be separated, but they belong to one broad fact: once movement becomes regular, an economy grows around making it possible, profitable or governable.

Networks also distribute risk inside families. One member may leave first while others keep the household, care for children or work land at home. Success can finance the next journey. Failure can be absorbed across several earners. The result is a transnational household whose decisions span two legal systems and several currencies. A government may count one migrant worker. The family may experience an income strategy, a care arrangement and a future claim to reunification.

This produces cumulative movement. Each departure can make another

departure more likely by spreading information, changing local expectations and creating contacts abroad. A village in which nobody has migrated treats departure as an exceptional gamble. A village with years of movement may have lenders, returnees, specialised brokers and a social script for who should go next. Migration becomes normal without becoming inevitable.

Routes remember power as well as trust. Colonial shipping lanes, shared languages, military connections and former imperial citizenship can keep shaping movement long after the political relationship changes. Employers may recruit from places whose workers are already familiar to managers. States sign bilateral labour agreements. Universities market in countries where alumni can reassure the next cohort. History leaves grooves because new routes must be built alone.

Modern communication speeds the process without abolishing uncertainty. A video call can show a room, a payslip or a route; it can also transmit rumour from the one success story while hiding failed journeys. Networks improve information, but information travelling through trust is not the same as a representative sample.

The memory can break. War closes transport. A currency crisis destroys the wage advantage. Visa rules separate relatives. A scandal discredits recruiters. Children raised at destination may no longer maintain the old connection. Networks are powerful because they solve practical problems, not because culture commands people to move forever.

This is why enforcement aimed only at the final crossing often disappoints. By the time a route reaches a border, households, employers and intermediaries may already have invested in it. A barrier can raise cost, redirect the path or change who controls passage. Erasing the route requires changing the conditions and institutions that keep rebuilding it.

The State Makes the Immigrant

There were travellers, exiles, settlers, merchants, pilgrims and strangers long before there were immigration departments. Kingdoms controlled movement, cities expelled outsiders and empires distinguished subjects from enemies. Yet the modern immigrant is inseparable from a particular political machine: a world divided into territorial states that document their own citizens and claim authority over the entry and residence of everyone else.

The passport carries this arrangement. It does more than identify a face. It links a person to a state whose document is expected to be recognised by another state. During much of the nineteenth century, parts of Europe moved towards fewer passport restrictions. From the late nineteenth century and through the First World War, identification and border controls proliferated. The modern state gained what the sociologist John Torpey called a monopoly over the legitimate means of movement. A journey that had once depended chiefly on money and transport increasingly required administrative permission.

Permission is divided into categories. A visitor may enter without working. A student may work under limits. A seasonal worker may have to leave when the contract ends. A permanent resident may live indefinitely without voting. A citizen normally holds a stronger right of return than a lifelong non-citizen resident. The same human ability can therefore carry different legal weight. A doctor treating patients under one visa and the same doctor awaiting an asylum decision are not equally free in the labour market, even if their qualifications are identical.

Refugee status is a particular protection, not a synonym for hardship. The 1951 Refugee Convention centres on a person outside the country of nationality who has a well-founded fear of persecution for one of the treaty's listed reasons and is unable, or because of that fear unwilling, to use that country's protection. It separately covers a stateless person outside their former habitual residence who cannot or will not return for the same reason. The 1967 Protocol removed the pre-1951 limit and required its parties to

apply the framework without a new geographical limit, while allowing certain earlier declarations to continue. Regional systems and human-rights law add other protections. The categories remain narrower than every reason a person may be unable to live safely at home.

An asylum-seeker is somebody asking for protection whose claim has not been finally decided. Recognition does not create the past persecution, but it changes what the receiving state must acknowledge and what rights become usable. During the wait, work, housing and movement may be restricted. Administrative delay becomes part of the person's life even though it appears in policy as processing time.

Irregular migration describes a mismatch between a person's presence or work and the applicable rules. It may follow an unauthorised crossing, but many people enter lawfully and later overstay or breach a condition. Calling the person illegal turns a changeable legal status into an account of the whole human being. Calling every breach harmless does the opposite error. The law is real; the category is neither natural nor permanent.

Status can change while the person stays still. A visa expires, a government recognises a new state, a marriage ends, a child becomes an adult or a law reclassifies an old right. Citizenship may be acquired by birthplace, descent or naturalisation, and those routes produce different populations of members without any border crossing that day.

State power is distributed. Consulates issue visas, airlines check documents, employers verify permission, universities sponsor students, courts review decisions and local offices record residence. A migrant may never meet a border guard yet encounter the border through a refused job, a bank request or a landlord's form. Immigration is the system by which geography becomes a status that follows a person inland.

Work Arrives With a Status

In 2022, the International Labour Organization estimated that 167.7 million international migrants were in the global labour force, about 4.7 per cent of it. The figure is less revealing than the arrangement behind it. Migrant labour is concentrated by country, occupation, sex, skill and legal route. A nurse recruited into a public health system, a software engineer transferred within a company, a domestic worker living in an employer's home and a farm worker admitted for a harvest are all counted as workers. Their bargaining positions are worlds apart.

Employers recruit across borders when they cannot, will not or need not fill a job locally at the offered terms. Sometimes the shortage is one of rare skill. Sometimes it is geography, season or unsocial hours. Sometimes the job is unattractive because pay and conditions are poor, and access to a more constrained workforce allows the model to continue. The phrase jobs local people will not do often conceals the missing clause: at this wage, in this place, under these conditions.

Migration changes labour supply, but a labour market is not a row of fixed chairs. Migrants also rent homes, buy goods, start firms, pay taxes, require services and allow businesses to expand. Employers change technology and production in response to available labour. Native workers can move between occupations. Some migrant skills complement existing workers; others compete more directly. The relevant effect therefore depends on which workers, in which place, over what period and under what institutions.

Evidence reflects that complexity. Large national studies in the United States generally find small long-run effects on the average wages and employment of native-born workers, while identifying greater exposure among some earlier immigrants and workers with similar skills. A sharp local labour-supply increase on the German-Czech border produced more adverse employment and wage effects in the exposed market. These findings do not cancel each other. They answer different questions at different scales.

The distribution of gains matters. Consumers may receive cheaper services. Employers may gain flexibility or profit. Migrant workers may multiply their earnings relative to home while still being underpaid relative to local standards. Homeowners can benefit from demand while renters face higher costs where housing supply is rigid. A national fiscal estimate can look favourable while one municipality must add school places quickly. Average benefit is not a receipt showing who paid.

Legal status enters the wage bargain. A worker who can change employer can refuse abuse more credibly than one whose residence depends on a sponsor. Sponsorship systems in parts of the Arab region have tied immigration status to an individual employer, restricting exit and increasing exploitation risk, though reforms and rules differ by country. Temporary schemes elsewhere can create a milder version of the same asymmetry. Deportability need not be used every day to influence behaviour. Its possibility sits in the room.

Fiscal effects have the same dependence on composition and time. A young worker may pay more in taxes than they use in services for years, then age in the country. A child requires schooling before entering the labour force. Whether the public balance is positive depends on earnings, age, family, eligibility, housing and the design of the tax-and-service system.

Care exposes another transfer. A migrant may provide childcare, nursing or domestic labour abroad while relatives perform unpaid care for the family left behind. Money moves home; daily presence does not. The destination solves a care shortage by inserting another household into the chain.

Work is never the whole migrant. Policy often wants labour without settlement, output without family and flexibility without claims. Human beings have an irritating habit of refusing to remain an input.

Arrival Is Not Settlement

A border records an entry. It does not tell you whether the traveller will leave next month, remain for life or raise a child who never thinks of the journey as theirs. Immigration becomes socially consequential through duration, family and institutions, which is why the second generation often matters more than the first arrival.

Temporary labour programmes repeatedly discover this late. A worker meant to rotate becomes valuable to an employer, extends a residence and forms ties that cannot be switched off with the contract. West Germany called its recruits guests and then found that many became residents with families. The error was not failing to predict that every temporary worker would stay. It was treating labour as detachable from time.

Settlement is a sequence of ordinary negotiations. Can qualifications be recognised? Is language instruction available around working hours? Can a family rent near a job? Do children enter schools that expect them or schools already short of places? Can adults trust the police, use health care and move into jobs matching their skills? A visa admits a body. Institutions decide how much of the person can participate.

Integration is therefore multidimensional. Employment can improve while housing remains segregated. Children can speak the national language more fluently than their parents and still face discrimination. Political participation may lag behind economic contribution where naturalisation is difficult. Inter-marriage, friendship, identity and civic trust move at different speeds. No single indicator certifies that a group has integrated, and no society begins as a culturally motionless control group.

The receiving population changes too. Employers redesign workplaces. Schools add languages and revise expectations. Food, worship, music and neighbourhood commerce shift. Law adapts to new family forms and claims. Some changes are welcomed; others generate conflict. Integration is not a polite word for newcomers doing all the changing. It is the uneven accommodation through which people become mutually predictable enough

to share institutions.

Pace and concentration alter the process. A national population may absorb a modest annual inflow while particular districts experience rapid change because work, cheap housing and networks are clustered. Services expand slowly. Residents compare the visible pressure with national claims that averages are manageable and conclude that somebody is lying. Both scales can be accurate. The policy failure lies in pretending one dissolves the other.

The second generation should not be called immigrants as a matter of biography when they were born in the country, though statistics and politics may keep treating them as a migration outcome. Their progress reveals whether institutions convert formal membership into practical equality. Their failures can expose barriers that no language test imposed on their parents could repair.

Return and onward migration remain part of the story. Many students leave after study. Seasonal workers circulate. Retirees go home. Families split time between countries. Others intend to return until a child's schooling, a mortgage, political instability or simple habit changes the calculation. The distinction between temporary and permanent is often an outcome, not an intention known at entry.

Citizenship can close some of the distance. Naturalisation secures residence, political rights and the ability to leave without losing the right to return. Yet formal citizenship does not erase ancestry, accent or unequal treatment. Conversely, a person can belong socially while holding insecure papers. The Windrush scandal in Britain showed how people who had lived lawfully for decades could be treated as suspect when later systems demanded documents their earlier lives had never required.

Arrival is a date. Settlement is a relationship. It is built through repeated contact and can be damaged by rules written long after the crossing.

Movement Remakes the Gate

Migration is usually described from the destination because that is where the political argument is loudest. Every route has three indispensable positions: the person who moves, the place entered and the place left. Transit states, employers, relatives, recruiters and brokers may also shape it. Each position changes the others, and those changes feed back into future movement.

At origin, remittances can pay for food, housing, education, health care and investment. They can also raise local prices, widen gaps between households with and without migrants, or make a family dependent on work performed under weak protections abroad. Emigration may remove nurses, engineers or teachers from services that trained them. It can also create returnees, professional networks, trade links and money for further education. Brain drain and brain gain are rival outcomes produced by the same route under different conditions.

The absence itself has social effects. Grandparents raise children. Farming decisions change. Women may gain control of household money or inherit more unpaid care. Political ideas return through visits, media and organisations. Diasporas fund businesses, charities, political parties and civic organisations. A state may court citizens abroad for investment while distrusting their political influence. The border does not stop membership from stretching.

At destination, migrants alter the age structure, labour supply, housing demand and map of family life. Cities grow through particular corridors: one district connects to one province, port or island because the first arrivals built a foothold. Institutions recruit translators, teachers, clergy, lawyers and specialised businesses. A category that began in an immigration file becomes a neighbourhood, an electorate and eventually an ancestry box on a census form.

Politics reacts to both the scale and the story told about it. Research in several wealthy democracies finds that attitudes are not explained well by

narrow personal wage competition alone. People respond to perceived national economic and cultural effects, and those perceptions can be badly wrong. Rapid local change and weak services can sharpen hostility. So can political entrepreneurs who turn every social failure into evidence against the newcomer. Neither mechanism means opposition is imaginary or inevitable. It means opinion is produced through institutions, experience and narrative rather than read directly from an immigration total.

The politics can then detach from the measured effects. A vivid offence, a crowded classroom or a factory closure can become a story about an entire population, while a favourable national average can be used to dismiss the people bearing a local transition. Both shortcuts replace distribution with symbolism. The useful question is which effect, on whom, under which rules, and whether the evidence comes from a setting that can travel.

The political feedback is asymmetric. International human-rights law protects freedom to leave any country and bars arbitrary denial of entry to one's own country. It creates no general entitlement to enter another state, although refugee protection, family rights, regional free movement and other duties qualify state discretion. Emigration can be praised as freedom while immigration is treated as permission. Every modern admission system is built inside that gap.

Rules then change behaviour. Family restrictions can alter who travels first and how long separations last. Employer-tied visas can reduce mobility within the labour market. Closing one authorised route may redirect demand towards another status or an irregular route. Severe restrictions can encourage people already present to settle rather than risk leaving and being unable to return. Liberal rules can increase circulation by making departure less costly. Policy controls movement, but people adjust to the control.

The adjustment can surprise the state. Germany recruited temporary labour and acquired families. Britain treated imperial subjects as members, later narrowed entry and eventually demanded proof from people whose status had once been assumed. The United States excluded Chinese labourers

while employers and migrants sought other routes and legal categories. Refugee law created protection for people outside their state, then wars and persecution tested definitions built from the last catastrophe.

This completes the loop. Unequal places generate reasons to move. Capability, networks and rules select who travels. Status shapes work and settlement. Settlement changes families, labour markets, cities, origins and political coalitions. Those changes remake the gate that the next traveller meets.

The modern world was not made by movement alone. It was made by the repeated struggle to decide what movement entitles a person to share.

How It Actually Works

Before immigration

Humans populated the world by moving. Hunters followed animals and seasons. Farmers spread crops and languages. Pastoralists crossed ranges that later governments would divide. Merchants, pilgrims, soldiers, slaves and scholars travelled through empires whose rulers taxed roads, guarded ports and expelled unwanted strangers. None of this waited for a modern passport.

What changed was the state. Medieval and early modern rulers controlled movement unevenly, often caring more about allegiance, tax and local order than about sealing every territorial edge. A person might be known through a parish, guild, household or lord. Rights could depend on estate, religion or city membership rather than a uniform national citizenship. Borders existed, but the world was not yet organised as a complete grid of states expected to document populations and classify every crossing.

The political revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries sharpened the distinction between citizen and foreigner. States counted people, registered births, raised conscript armies and claimed populations as national resources. At the same time, industrialisation, empire and

cheaper transport multiplied the reasons and means to move. The modern migration system grew from that collision: economies pulling people across widening networks while states became more capable of deciding whose movement was legitimate.

Empires moved people

One decisive system of long-distance modern movement was colonial, and its categories resist polite compression. European settlers crossed oceans with the backing of states, companies and armies, then took land already inhabited. They were migrants in the physical sense and colonisers in the political one. Calling settlement immigration without naming conquest turns power into a travel story.

The Atlantic slave trade was movement stripped of choice. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, about 12.5 million captive Africans were embarked on slave ships and about 10.7 million survived to disembark in the Americas. They were transported as property into plantation systems that produced sugar, cotton, tobacco and wealth on a continental scale. Their descendants built societies while laws denied that they had entered them as persons.

After slavery was abolished across European empires, plantation owners still wanted controlled labour. Indenture supplied part of it. Indian and Chinese workers signed contracts for plantations, mines, railways and other work across the Caribbean, Africa, Southeast Asia and the Pacific. The contract distinguished indenture from chattel slavery, but recruitment fraud, debt, penal sanctions and employer control could make freedom thin. Many workers returned; others settled and formed populations that remain central to Guyana, Trinidad, Fiji, Mauritius, Malaysia and other societies.

The paperwork could look voluntary while the system narrowed every later choice. Recruits were processed through depots, assigned contracts and transported to an employer whose authority was backed by colonial law. Leaving work could be punished as a breach rather than treated as an ordinary resignation. Sex ratios were often heavily male in early flows,

shaping marriage and family formation after settlement. When contracts ended, a promised or subsidised return did not erase years already lived abroad, children born there or the land and businesses workers had begun to acquire.

Indenture was only one part of Asian mobility. Merchants, dock workers, farmers and miners travelled through family and commercial networks outside formal contracts. Colonial rule channelled movement along shipping lines, legal categories and labour demands. Empire opened routes for some subjects while building racial hierarchies that restricted where they could live and what work they could claim.

Three systems of mass migration

The standard nineteenth-century story follows Europeans across the Atlantic. It is enormous and incomplete. Between the mid-nineteenth century and the Second World War, tens of millions left Europe for the Americas and Australasia. Irish families fled famine and dispossession. Italians moved through seasonal and permanent routes. Scandinavians farmed the American Midwest. Eastern and southern Europeans entered growing industrial cities. Steamships cut travel time and cost; railways joined inland villages to ports; letters and prepaid tickets made the next journey easier.

At comparable scale, Indians and southern Chinese moved through Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean world, while Russians, Chinese, Koreans and Japanese moved across northern Asia, Siberia and Manchuria. Reconstructing uneven records, the historian Adam McKeown placed each of these three broad long-distance systems on the order of fifty million movements between 1846 and 1940. The ranges are not three perfectly compatible censuses. They are strong enough to show that the Atlantic was one centre of global migration, not the whole map.

The physical experience differed by route, but a similar social technology travelled with it. Letters named employers and fares. Migrants sent prepaid tickets to relatives. Boarding houses near ports connected newcomers to work. In New York, Ellis Island became the emblem of Atlantic arrival; in

Rangoon, Singapore, Penang, Vladivostok and railway towns across northern Asia, other migration systems built their own arrival machinery. The famous gateway was one node in a much larger network.

All three systems combined markets with political power. Plantations needed labour. Mines and railways created concentrated demand. States sought settlers for frontiers. Shipping firms sold mobility. Families used established routes to spread risk. Return migration was common, and a crossing did not always become permanent settlement. The image of a one-way voyage towards a new national identity fits some lives and distorts many others.

Mobility also helped create racial categories. Settlers who welcomed European labour often resisted Asian workers doing similar jobs. Employers wanted workers; unions feared wage competition; politicians converted economic and cultural anxiety into exclusion. The global age of migration produced the modern border at the same time as it produced the modern migrant.

The gate closes

The United States barred most Chinese labourers through the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. White settler societies across the Pacific developed literacy tests, head taxes, landing rules and national restrictions aimed at Asians without always naming race in the final wording. Australia made racial exclusion a founding federal policy in 1901. Canada imposed a head tax on Chinese entrants and later near-total exclusion. South Africa, the United States and other states borrowed techniques from one another.

Exclusion also encouraged legal creativity. Officials tried to distinguish merchants from labourers, temporary entrants from settlers and legitimate relatives from invented ones. Migrants learned the categories because a classification could decide admission. Court cases tested citizenship, family identity and treaty rights. What looked like a wall was already a negotiation conducted through forms, testimony and proof.

The machinery mattered. A racial preference became more enforceable

when officials could inspect documents, record identity and make carriers responsible for passengers. Medical examinations and literacy tests turned political judgements into administrative procedures. The border officer appeared to apply a neutral rule even when the system had been designed around a desired population.

Europe followed a different nineteenth-century rhythm. Passport controls weakened across much of the continent as states and markets favoured travel. The First World War reversed that liberal trend. Governments feared spies, deserters and enemy nationals, rationed resources and registered populations. Emergency controls became normal infrastructure. The interwar passport standard made international movement increasingly dependent on a document issued by one state and accepted by another.

The United States Immigration Act of 1924 joined numerical quotas to a national-origins formula that heavily favoured northern and western Europeans. The law did not end migration; it changed its composition, routes and legal forms. Across the world, states learned to admit workers selectively while claiming a general right to exclude. Immigration had become a policy field because the gate had become an institution.

War creates the refugee

The new documentary order produced a crisis after the First World War. Revolutions and collapsing empires left people outside the protection of a state, sometimes because the government they had fled withdrew their nationality. Without a recognised passport, a refugee could be unable to travel to work, reunite with family or regularise residence.

In 1922, the League of Nations approved the document known as the Nansen passport. It did not give its holder a country. It gave other countries a recognised way to identify and admit a person whose former state would not. Fifty-two states eventually recognised the arrangement, and hundreds of thousands of refugees used Nansen documents before the system ended. A piece of paper restored movement by substituting international recognition for national protection.

The Second World War displaced populations across Europe and Asia on a far greater scale. Borders were redrawn, minorities expelled, survivors released from camps and millions unable or unwilling to return to states that had persecuted them or changed regime. Decolonisation produced further mass movement. After the 1947 partition of British India, roughly fourteen to fifteen million people reached another part of the new Indian and Pakistani states by 1951, while estimates of all those driven from home can run higher. These were not immigration programmes. They were political ruptures lived through bodies, trains, roads and abandoned homes.

The Nansen document reveals what a passport normally hides. A citizen's passport works because another state assumes a government stands behind the bearer. The refugee document had to replace that missing relationship with an international arrangement. It made a person administratively visible without pretending that the state of origin would protect them. The invention was modest, paper-based and life-changing because work and escape often required legal mobility.

The 1951 Refugee Convention turned one part of this experience into law. It defined a refugee around a well-founded fear of persecution linked to specified grounds and established standards of treatment, including protection against return to a territory where life or freedom would be threatened on a Convention ground, subject to the treaty's terms. The instrument originally concerned events before 1 January 1951 and allowed a European geographical limitation. The 1967 Protocol removed the time limit and applied the Convention's definition without a new geographical restriction, while allowing certain existing declarations to continue.

Refugee law did not cover every person displaced by war, disaster, poverty or state collapse. Internal displacement remained primarily within a state's territory. Regional instruments later broadened protection in parts of Africa and Latin America. Human-rights law restricted some removals beyond the Convention definition. The architecture grew in layers, and people whose danger looked similar could receive different answers depending on route, location and legal test.

Labour recruited, membership withheld

After the Second World War, rich economies rebuilt with labour drawn from colonies, neighbouring states and formal recruitment programmes.

Governments spoke of temporary need. Employers often planned on continued supply. Workers made plans of their own.

The United States and Mexico operated the Bracero Program from 1942 to 1964, issuing millions of temporary agricultural work contracts. The system supplied farms with labour and offered Mexican workers earnings unavailable at home. It also concentrated power in growers and recruiters. Contracts promised standards that enforcement did not always deliver, while repeat participation blurred the line between seasonal labour and an established migration route.

West Germany signed a recruitment agreement with Italy in 1955 and with Turkey in 1961, followed by other agreements. Workers were called guests and initially expected to rotate after a short stay. Firms objected to losing trained staff. Rotation weakened, the recruitment stop of 1973 did not send settled families back, and many former guest workers became permanent residents. The programme imported labour and discovered society.

Recruitment was never confined to male factory labour. Hospitals and care services drew nurses and other staff from former colonies and overseas labour markets. Domestic work moved large numbers of women into private homes where inspection was difficult and dependence on one employer could be severe. Migration systems therefore reproduced the gendered division of labour across borders: paid care at destination rested on care reorganised or left unpaid at origin.

Britain's route ran through empire. The British Nationality Act 1948 created a broad status of Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies within an imperial citizenship system. Commonwealth citizens moved to Britain to work in transport, health care, manufacturing and public services. The Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 introduced entry controls over people who had previously possessed broad rights of movement. Decolonisation

turned people once classified as imperial members into immigrants, sometimes within a single lifetime.

Oil-producing states in the Gulf built another model, admitting large migrant workforces while limiting routes to permanent membership. Sponsorship systems tied many workers' legal residence to employers, though laws and reforms vary by state. The arrangement shows the purest version of a recurring political wish: labour should cross the border, perform its function and leave without changing the citizen body.

Settlement defeats the temporary plan

Temporary systems tend to underestimate time. A worker who stays long enough learns a job, rents a home, forms relationships and becomes expensive to replace. Employers lobby to retain trained staff. Spouses and children join where law permits. Children born or raised at destination enter schools and imagine futures that cannot be rotated at the end of a contract.

Policy then shifts from admission to family and membership. The United States Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished the national-origins quota system and placed greater weight on family reunification and occupational preferences. The resulting migration did not follow one legislative forecast. Existing communities used family categories, new Asian and Latin American routes expanded, and the demographic meaning of American immigration changed over decades.

Western European states made parallel discoveries after post-war recruitment. Countries that had claimed not to be immigration nations developed settled populations with claims to residence, schooling, worship and citizenship. Rules differed sharply. Some relied more on birthplace citizenship; others on descent and naturalisation. Guest workers could become long-term residents while remaining politically excluded. The second generation made temporary language harder to sustain because the country of immigration was their country of birth.

Free movement within the European Union created a different legal space. Participating citizens could move for work, study and residence under

shared rules while external borders remained controlled. A person classified as an immigrant in ordinary speech might be exercising a treaty right rather than seeking discretionary admission. The system showed that borders can be made less consequential for selected populations without disappearing.

Settlement also exposed the difference between entry control and integration. Governments could limit visas more quickly than they could build housing, recognise qualifications, teach language or repair discrimination. Rapid inflows concentrated in particular towns tested schools and local services even where the national economy absorbed them. Neglect then became evidence in the next political argument about whether immigration itself had failed.

A global system with unequal doors

By the twenty-first century, migration routes had multiplied rather than converged. States competed for selected graduates and investors, recruited nurses and care workers, admitted students as both learners and future labour, recognised some family ties and restricted others. Low-paid workers often received the most temporary status even when their jobs were permanent features of the economy.

Authorised routes coexist with irregular ones because labour demand, family connection and danger do not disappear when a visa category closes. Some people cross without permission; many enter lawfully and later overstay or work outside their conditions. States respond with detention, removal, employer sanctions and carrier checks. These measures can reduce particular movements, but they also change prices, risks, routes and who has the power to organise passage.

Much international migration occurs between neighbouring countries and within regions of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the former Soviet world. The wealthy West is a major destination and not the only destination. Gulf states host large foreign workforces. South Africa attracts regional migration. Côte d'Ivoire, Thailand, Malaysia, Kazakhstan and other states sit inside substantial regional systems. The geography follows wage gaps,

peace, language, colonial ties and accessible routes more than a single hierarchy leading north and west.

Forced displacement expanded alongside labour and family migration. UNHCR's end-2025 picture placed 65 per cent of refugees and other people needing international protection in a neighbouring country, while 68 per cent were hosted by low- or middle-income states. Resettlement elsewhere remained available to a small minority. The global protection system asks states nearest a crisis to carry much of the immediate burden while the politics of distant arrivals dominates richer countries.

Digital records now connect permission across time. Biometric enrolment, entry and exit data, employer checks and online applications can make administration faster and more consistent. They can also turn an error into a barrier repeated across institutions. The modern gate is no longer one officer at one line. It is a network deciding before travel, during residence and at the next attempt to move.

Yet the old mechanism remains. Difference creates a reason. Capability and networks create a route. Law assigns a status. Work and family create duration. Settlement changes both ends. Politics rewrites the rule.

How we know

Migration statistics are built from censuses, population registers, border records, visas, surveys and administrative decisions. They do not measure the same event. An international migrant stock usually counts people living outside their country of birth at a stated date, with nationality substituted where birthplace data are unavailable. A flow counts moves during a period. Net migration subtracts departures from arrivals. Publication year, reference period and dataset vintage must remain separate.

Irregular migration is harder to estimate because the category includes unauthorised entry, overstaying and work outside conditions, and because people may avoid records. UNHCR's headline refugee totals combine several operational populations, not one identical legal status. Internal displacement counts people who have not crossed a state border, while

annual displacement movements can count the same person more than once. At end-2025, UNHCR reported 68.7 million people internally displaced by conflict or violence; IDMC's broader total also included disaster displacement.

Historical estimates are less even. Passenger lists record some ports and periods well; family movement, return journeys and land crossings can disappear. Colonial archives describe labour through the institutions that recruited or controlled it. The record is strongest where states, employers and ships wanted a count, and weakest where migrants moved outside their categories.

What People Get Wrong

“Everyone is moving”

The absolute number of international migrants is historically high, so headlines describe an age of unprecedented human mobility. The United Nations estimate for mid-2024 was about 304 million people living outside their country of birth. The number is immense. It was also about 3.7 per cent of the world population.

The mistake comes from confusing stock with flow and number with proportion. A migrant stock contains people who moved last year and people who moved forty years ago. Population growth raises the count even if the share changes modestly. Net migration can rise because fewer migrants leave, not because arrivals suddenly multiplied. Internal movement, including rural-to-urban migration and displacement within a country, is excluded from the international figure.

The correction is not that immigration is small. In particular countries, cities or age groups it can be transformative. The correction is that a global total does not describe the pace of change in one place, and a dramatic flow in one year does not mean humanity as a whole is becoming nomadic. Ask what is being counted, over what period and against which population.

“Most migrants are refugees”

Refugees dominate the moral and visual language of migration, but they are a distinct minority of international migrants. At the end of 2025, UNHCR reported a headline total of 41.6 million refugees and nearly 9 million pending asylum-seekers. The wider total of 117.8 million forcibly displaced people included 68.7 million uprooted within their own countries by conflict or violence.

Even the refugee headline combines populations counted under different mandates and operational categories. It includes refugees under UNHCR's mandate, people in refugee-like situations, other people needing international protection and Palestine refugees registered under UNRWA. Those people need protection, but the total should not be read as one identical status produced by one legal procedure.

Public debate collapses the categories because people can travel through mixed routes and because asylum becomes shorthand for immigration. A refugee is not every person facing hardship. An asylum-seeker is awaiting a decision, not somebody already proved fraudulent or already recognised.

The geography is also misread. At end-2025, 65 per cent were in neighbouring countries and 68 per cent in low- or middle-income states. Treating every migrant as a refugee makes ordinary migration harder to govern. Treating every protection claim as ordinary labour migration removes the reason refugee law exists.

“Immigrants take a fixed number of jobs”

This is the lump-of-labour error: imagine an economy with a set number of chairs, then assume every migrant sitting down removes one from somebody born locally. Labour markets adjust. Migrants work, spend, rent, pay tax, start firms and allow production to expand. Their skills can complement some workers and compete more directly with others.

The error remains persuasive because competition can be real at a particular place and time. A sudden increase in workers with similar skills

can weaken wages or employment for exposed groups, especially where demand adjusts slowly. Earlier migrants may face more direct competition than the average native-born worker. National estimates can hide that local cost.

Major United States syntheses tend to find small long-run effects on average native wages and employment, with greater exposure for some close substitutes. A study of Czech workers gaining access to part of the German border labour market found moderate wage losses and sharper employment losses among local native workers. The findings differ because the populations, scale, institutions and adjustment periods differ.

The useful question is which workers substitute for one another, which jobs expand, how quickly housing and capital adjust, and who captures the gain. An average near zero can contain winners, losers and a policy choice about whether either group receives help.

“Immigrants bring more crime”

A crime committed by an immigrant proves that an immigrant committed a crime. It does not establish a population rate. Prison shares and raw arrest counts are especially weak shortcuts because migrants and native-born populations can differ in age and sex, foreign nationality is not the same as foreign birth, and detention, policing, conviction, sentence length and deportation affect who appears in custody.

Several United States studies have found first-generation or undocumented immigrants offending, being arrested or being imprisoned at rates no higher than native-born comparison groups, and sometimes lower. One state-level study found no increase in violent crime as the estimated undocumented population grew from 1990 to 2014. Texas data for 2012 to 2018 showed lower felony arrest rates among undocumented immigrants than among US-born citizens.

Those findings are not a law of migration. They come from one country, and the Texas study comes from one state's unusual administrative data. Rates can vary by offence, sex, age, route, reception and generation. Migrants are

also victims, including of employers, traffickers and crimes they may fear reporting.

The correction is methodological rather than flattering. Compare like populations, use rates rather than anecdotes, examine victimisation as well as offending, and do not turn one offender into evidence about millions of people.

“A tougher border switches migration off”

Enforcement can reduce entry through a route. It cannot abolish the reasons, networks and labour demands that produced the route, and it may change behaviour in ways the headline count misses. A closed visa category can redirect people towards another status, lengthen family separation, raise smuggling prices or encourage migrants already present to remain rather than risk being unable to return.

The myth is attractive because it treats the border as an on-off valve. Governments also prefer measures they control directly to slower work on employers, asylum decisions, housing, foreign policy or legal pathways. A fence is visible. A changed incentive is not.

None of this means enforcement never works. States can influence volume, composition, timing and risk. The effect depends on geography, administrative capacity, demand at destination and alternatives available to migrants. Research on the United States-Mexico route found that stronger enforcement reduced circular return and contributed to longer settlement. That result explains one historical route, not every border.

Judge a restriction by the whole response: authorised entries, irregular entries, exits, duration, route displacement, enforcement cost and human risk. Counting interceptions alone measures contact with the system, not movement prevented.

“Temporary workers stay temporary”

A visa can expire on schedule. A labour system need not. Employers retain workers who know the job, migrants renew contracts, relationships form and children enter school. Governments that recruit labour for permanent economic needs often discover that the word temporary described their preference, not the likely social result.

The misconception survives because entry categories are mistaken for human trajectories. West Germany called post-war recruits guest workers and expected rotation. Firms resisted losing trained staff, rotation weakened and many workers settled with families. Other temporary programmes have produced more circulation because contracts, enforcement, distance and family rules differed. There is no automatic law that every worker stays.

The planning error lies at both extremes. Treating all temporary migration as permanent ignores return, onward movement and repeated seasonal work. Treating all workers as detachable labour ignores time, employer demand and family life. Restricting family reunion can delay settlement, but it can also prolong separation or encourage people to remain because leaving threatens return.

Test a temporary scheme over a family horizon. Can workers change employer? Is repeated recruitment expected? What happens after injury, redundancy, partnership or a child's birth? A policy with no credible answer is not avoiding settlement. It is postponing the vocabulary.

“Climate change has one refugee number”

Forecasts of hundreds of millions or a billion climate refugees create a clean future picture from evidence that cannot support one. Climate change can destroy homes, reduce livelihoods, intensify hazards and interact with conflict. It therefore affects movement. It does not produce one legally defined population travelling internationally on a measurable schedule.

Much disaster displacement is internal and short-distance. Slow environmental change may lead first to altered crops, seasonal work, urban

movement or immobility among people who cannot afford to leave. Whether movement crosses a border depends on income, adaptation, conflict, family networks and state policy. Climate harm alone does not create a general status under the 1951 Refugee Convention, though people affected by it may qualify under refugee or human-rights law for other reasons.

The huge numbers usually combine scenarios, populations exposed to risk and assumptions about adaptation, then present the result as people who will migrate. Different studies count different events.

Rejecting the single number is not reassurance. Climate change can make movement more dangerous and increase displacement sharply in particular places. The honest claim is harder: it changes the pressures inside a system whose political and human responses remain contingent. Plan for mobility and for safe ways to remain, rather than advertising a forecast as a census from the future.

Use It

Name the population

Before accepting any claim about immigration, replace the word immigrants with the population being discussed. Foreign-born residents? Foreign nationals? People arriving this year? People leaving? International students? Work-visa holders? Recognised refugees? Asylum-seekers awaiting a decision? People without current permission? Children born locally to foreign-born parents?

The categories overlap and answer different questions. A foreign-born citizen may have lived in the country for fifty years. A foreign national may have been born there. An asylum application is a claim, not a permanent addition to the population. A student arrival can increase gross immigration and later increase emigration when the course ends. Net migration can fall because departures rise while arrivals remain high.

Then ask for the denominator. Three hundred thousand arrivals mean one

thing in a country of five million and another in a country of eighty million. A national share can conceal concentration in one city. A stock of settled residents says little about the speed of recent change.

This discipline forces a speaker to reveal the question beneath the word. If the concern is school capacity, recent local child arrivals matter. If it is citizenship, birthplace may be a poor measure. If it is border control, a census stock accumulated over decades is the wrong instrument.

Separate level, pace and concentration

Three places can contain the same foreign-born share and experience immigration differently. One reached it gradually over forty years. Another received a rapid inflow after war or recruitment. A third has most newcomers in a few districts near particular employers. The level is equal. The administrative and political experience is not.

Pace determines how quickly housing, schools, health care, language provision and transport must adjust. Concentration determines who encounters the adjustment. National tax receipts do not put a classroom beside the factory town that needs one. A government can be correct that immigration benefits the economy while a local authority is correct that the funding formula has left it carrying an immediate cost.

Use a two-scale test. First ask what happens to the country across several years: output, wages, public revenue, age structure and investment. Then ask what happens to exposed workers, tenants, neighbourhoods and services during the transition. Policy fails when it uses the first answer to dismiss the second, or the second to deny every wider gain.

The same test improves moral judgement. A host country may admit a manageable number in aggregate while placing nearly all asylum accommodation in poorer areas with cheap housing. Opposition there need not prove general hostility to refugees. It may reveal that the state distributed its humanitarian commitment through somebody else's local capacity.

Follow the whole route

A border outcome is rarely caused at the border alone. Work backwards. Who created demand? Which relatives or recruiters made the route usable? What legal path existed, closed or became too slow? Who financed travel? What did the person expect to earn or escape? Which state, employer or institution issued the document that made movement possible?

Then follow the route forward. Can the person change employer? Is family reunion possible? What happens when the visa expires? Can qualifications be used? Is departure recorded? Does temporary status lead to permanence, enforced return or repeated circulation? What happens to children?

This prevents symbolic policy. A government may announce a lower cap while hospitals recruit abroad through a different route. It may close authorised seasonal entry while employers continue to demand the same labour. It may speed removal decisions while leaving asylum claims unresolved for years. It may deter departure from one coast and shift boats to a longer route.

Following the route does not mean every control is futile. It means judging a control by the system's response rather than the photograph of the intervention. Count changed entries, exits, duration, displacement, price, risk and employer behaviour. The migrant is adapting to policy; the policy must be evaluated after the adaptation.

Trace rights into outcomes

Two workers with the same skill can produce different labour-market effects because their rights differ. One can resign, organise, rent freely and remain after losing a job. Another depends on an employer for residence, accommodation and return travel. The second may accept wages or treatment the first would refuse. Their legal status becomes an economic variable.

When low pay or exploitation appears, do not stop at nationality. Ask

whether the worker can change jobs, claim unpaid wages, contact inspectors, use health care and report abuse without risking removal. Ask whether recruiters charged debt, whether accommodation is tied to employment and whether a family depends on remittances that make leaving harder.

This lens also corrects flattering accounts of contribution. Saying migrants fill shortages can conceal a system that solves staffing by importing workers with less bargaining power. Saying they take jobs can conceal employers choosing a workforce whose status makes the job cheaper. The relevant policy may be labour inspection, portable visas, training, housing or sector pay rather than a single change in admission numbers.

Rights affect integration too. Long periods without permission to work can damage skills and independence. Insecure residence discourages investment in language, qualifications and community ties. A government cannot design people as temporary for years and then complain that they did not settle well.

Look one generation later

The first generation reveals the route. The second reveals the society.

Ask how the children of migrants perform compared with their parents and with peers who grew up under the same institutions. Do they complete school, enter skilled work, earn similar wages, live in mixed neighbourhoods and participate politically? Do gaps narrow, persist or change form? The answer shows what migration policy alone cannot: whether schools, labour markets and citizenship convert residence into membership.

Keep the comparison honest. Children of highly selected professional migrants should not be used as proof that every institution is fair. Children of refugees may begin after disrupted schooling and trauma. Outcomes differ by class, race, sex, place and the reception their parents received. Averages across all descendants can erase the mechanism.

The generational view also changes language. Somebody born in the

country may be connected to immigration history without being an immigrant. Calling them one forever turns ancestry into a provisional status. Conversely, refusing to discuss inherited disadvantage because the border crossing happened decades ago hides how legal and social arrangements reproduce themselves.

Temporary labour schemes should be tested with the same horizon. What happens if workers stay, marry, have children or become too established to remove humanely? If the policy has no credible answer, it is not temporary planning. It is permanent settlement with delayed vocabulary.

The limits

No framework removes the political choice. Evidence can estimate labour effects, fiscal balances, service demand and integration outcomes. It cannot decide how much cultural change a community should accept, how family claims should weigh against numerical control, or how many refugees a state owes protection beyond its legal duties. Those are judgements about membership and responsibility.

The evidence is uneven. Rich states count visas and residents more effectively than poor or conflict-affected states. Irregular populations are estimated with uncertainty. National averages can miss local experience, while dramatic local cases can be selected to misdescribe the nation. Causal effects change with policy, labour demand and the migrants admitted.

There is also no neutral baseline. A country without recent immigration still contains earlier conquests, movements and exclusions. A country with open labour demand can restrict entry, but the cost may appear through higher prices, automation, offshoring, unfilled care or work performed irregularly. Every option moves the burden rather than deleting it.

The one thing to keep

Keep the sequence.

A person does not become an immigration question merely by approaching

a line on a map. Difference made movement attractive or necessary. Resources and relationships made it possible. A state assigned a category. That category shaped work, safety and bargaining power. Time turned entry into settlement. Children and institutions carried the result forward. Politics then rewrote the next person's route.

Once you see that sequence, the usual argument looks unfinished. A number without a category is weak. A national average without distribution is weak. A border measure without behavioural response is weak. A demand for integration without institutional access is weak. A temporary scheme without a family horizon is fantasy.

The permanent change should be this: stop seeing immigration as a crowd arriving and start seeing a society deciding, repeatedly, who may move, who may work, who may stay and who may belong. The traveller crosses the border once. The border can follow the traveller for the rest of a life.

Terms

Migration. A change in usual residence, within a country or across an international border. The broad term includes voluntary, forced, temporary, circular and permanent movements, which are not equivalent.

Immigration. Movement into a country for residence from the perspective of that destination. It is an event, a legal field and a political category, depending on context.

Emigration. Movement out of a country from the perspective of the place left. The same journey is immigration at one end and emigration at the other, with different political consequences.

Migrant stock. The number of international migrants living in a territory at a specified date, usually identified by country of birth where data permit. It accumulates many years of movement.

Migration flow. The number of moves or people entering or leaving during a period. Flow statistics depend on national definitions and should not be

substituted for the resident migrant stock.

Net migration. Immigration minus emigration over a period. A positive figure means more arrivals than departures. It does not reveal how many people moved in either direction or why.

Foreign-born. A person whose country of birth differs from the country of current residence. The category includes naturalised citizens and long-settled residents, so it is not a measure of legal foreignness.

Foreign national. A resident who does not hold the citizenship of the country where they live. Some are locally born; some foreign-born residents are citizens. Nationality and birthplace answer different questions.

Diaspora. A population dispersed from an origin while maintaining some shared identity, connection or organisation across places. Diasporas can carry money, care, politics, trade and memory in several directions.

Remittance. Money or resources sent by migrants to people elsewhere, commonly relatives in the country of origin. Remittances support households but can also reshape inequality, care and local expectations.

Asylum-seeker. A person requesting international protection whose claim has not received a final decision. The term states a procedural position; it does not establish either refugee status or deception.

Refugee. In the 1951 Convention system, a person outside their country who, because of a well-founded fear of persecution for a listed reason, is unable or unwilling to use that country's protection. The definition has a parallel branch for stateless people outside their former habitual residence.

Internally displaced person. Someone forced to leave home but remaining inside their country's borders. Internal displacement can be larger than cross-border refuge and does not by itself trigger refugee status.

Non-refoulement. The principle barring return to a territory where a person faces specified serious threats, most famously in refugee law. Its exact scope and exceptions depend on the governing legal regime.

Irregular migration. Movement or residence outside applicable immigration rules. It can follow unauthorised entry, overstaying or prohibited work. Irregular describes a legal situation, not a permanent quality of a person.

Regularisation. A process allowing people in an irregular situation to obtain authorised residence or work status. Conditions may include duration of residence, employment, family ties or other national criteria.

Visa. Advance permission associated with entry, stay or activity under a state's rules. A visa does not always guarantee admission, and different visas attach sharply different rights and conditions.

Permanent residence. Authorisation to live indefinitely in a country without necessarily holding its citizenship. The status often strengthens work and family rights but may lapse after extended absence or misconduct.

Naturalisation. Acquisition of citizenship after birth through a legal process. Requirements can include residence, language, knowledge, character, income or renunciation, and vary widely between states.

Citizenship. Formal membership of a state, carrying rights and duties that may include residence, return, political participation and diplomatic protection. Equal formal citizenship does not guarantee equal social treatment.

Jus soli. Citizenship attributed through birth in a territory. States apply it in unconditional, conditional or restricted forms, often alongside descent rules rather than as a complete alternative.

Jus sanguinis. Citizenship attributed through descent from a citizen parent. It can sustain membership across generations abroad and can exclude locally born residents whose parents lack citizenship.

Family reunification. Admission or status based on a recognised family relationship. Rules reveal which ties a state treats as sufficient for shared residence and how it balances family life against control.

Labour migration. Movement primarily connected to employment or

economic activity. Routes range from permanent skilled admission to seasonal contracts, and the worker's freedom depends heavily on status design.

Guest worker. A migrant admitted for temporary employment under the expectation of later departure. History shows that employers, families and time can convert a temporary labour plan into settlement.

Chain migration. Movement enabled by earlier migrants through information, finance, housing, employment or family admission. The phrase describes a network mechanism, though political usage often turns it into an accusation.

Brain drain. Loss of educated or scarce-skilled workers from an origin country through emigration. The effect depends on training capacity, return, remittances and whether migration encourages more people to acquire skills.

Brain circulation. Movement in which skills, money and professional connections return or travel between countries rather than leaving one permanently. It is a possible outcome, not an automatic correction to brain drain.

Integration. The multidimensional process through which migrants and receiving institutions become able to participate together in economic, social, civic and political life. It is measured over time and generations.

Transnationalism. Sustained activity and identity across more than one state. A migrant can work, care, invest, vote, worship or organise across borders without choosing one society as the sole field of life.

Go Deeper

The accessible correction. Hein de Haas, *How Migration Really Works: A Factful Guide to the Most Divisive Issue in Politics* (2023). Begin here if you want a research-led challenge to the standard claims made by both supporters and opponents of immigration. De Haas is strongest on aspirations and capabilities, development, border restrictions, labour demand and climate forecasts. The myth-by-myth structure makes the book easy to enter, though it supplies less continuous global history than this subject deserves. Read it with a pencil whenever a claim sounds politically convenient. Its great virtue is symmetry: restrictionist and humanitarian slogans receive the same demand for mechanism, evidence and a credible counterexample.

The global history. Adam M. McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (2008). McKeown corrects the Atlantic-centred account by placing Chinese and other Asian movement inside the creation of modern border controls. It is the book for understanding why expanding global mobility and increasingly restrictive national categories grew together. The argument is scholarly and the institutional detail can be dense, but the payoff is large: immigration control stops looking like a collection of national inventions and becomes a connected world system. Pair it with McKeown's shorter article "Global Migration, 1846-1940" if you want the quantitative argument before committing to the full book.

The policy framework. World Bank, *World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies*. This is a broad recent institutional synthesis of how migration affects migrants, origin countries and destinations. Its match-and-motive framework separates the fit between migrants' attributes and destination needs from the reasons people move, then asks what policy follows. The report is data-rich, openly available and unusually attentive to distribution. Its labour-economics perspective can make political membership feel cleaner than it is, so use it as an analytical map rather than a complete moral settlement. The country case studies are

most useful when you compare them rather than turning one setting into a universal rule.

The state and the document. John C. Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State*, second edition (2018).

Read this to understand how governments acquired the administrative power to distinguish citizens from non-citizens and authorise movement.

Torpey's central argument, that states monopolised the legitimate means of movement, explains why a small booklet can carry such force. The history concentrates on Europe and the United States, and the prose assumes patience with legal and institutional change. It is still the clearest account of how movement became permission. The second edition carries the argument into biometric and post-September 2001 controls, which makes the historical machinery easier to recognise in present systems.

Notes and Sources

Reading the numbers

All global totals in the manuscript are stocks at a stated reference date unless the text says otherwise. They must not be treated as annual flows. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimated 304 million international migrants in mid-2024, equal to 3.7 per cent of the world population. Its preferred measure is country of birth, with citizenship used where birthplace data are unavailable. The International Labour Organization's latest global labour estimate was published in 2024 with a 2022 reference year and counts 167.7 million international migrants in the labour force, 4.7 per cent of that labour force. UNHCR's *Global Trends 2025*, released in June 2026, reports 117.8 million forcibly displaced people at the end of 2025. Its headline refugee total of 41.6 million combines 35.6 million refugees and other people needing international protection under UNHCR's mandate with 6.0 million Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate; nearly 9.0 million asylum-seekers had pending claims. These populations overlap with the broad migrant stock in some places but are not interchangeable. Internal displacement is separate because the person has not crossed an international border.

The Whole Thing in One Page

The distinction between mobility and immigration follows the historical argument developed by John Torpey and Adam McKeown: territorial states did not invent human movement, but they made movement dependent on national identity documents, admissibility categories and the state's claim to decide who could cross and remain. The account of migration as a process extending from aspiration to settlement draws on Hein de Haas's aspirations-and-capabilities framework, Douglas Massey and colleagues on networks and cumulative causation, and the World Bank's treatment of migration as a relationship among migrants, origin countries and destinations.

The warning against treating slavery as ordinary immigration is substantive.

SlaveVoyages estimates that about 12.5 million captive Africans embarked during the transatlantic trade and about 10.7 million disembarked alive. These were forced transports organised through enslavement, not exercises of migrant choice. The manuscript includes them because coerced movement helped construct the modern world, while preserving the categorical difference between a migrant choosing among constrained options and a person transported as property.

Why You Should Care

The 304 million and 3.7 per cent figures come from UN DESA's *International Migrant Stock 2024: Key Facts and Figures*. The source cautions that the 2024 revision is based on available national censuses, population registers and surveys, with definitions and coverage varying by country. The point in the text is deliberately double-sided: the stock is historically large in absolute terms, while the global share remains a small minority of humanity.

The forced-displacement figures and hosting pattern come from UNHCR's *Global Trends 2025*. UNHCR reports 68.7 million people internally displaced because of conflict or violence at the end of 2025. It reports that 65 per cent of refugees and other people needing international protection were hosted in a neighbouring country and 68 per cent in low- and middle-income countries. These are end-year stocks based on data available to UNHCR by 1 May 2026 and are stated at their published precision.

The discussion of category errors follows the legal and statistical distinction among a migrant, a refugee, an asylum-seeker, an internally displaced person and a person in an irregular situation. The International Organization for Migration's glossary is useful for general terminology; the binding refugee definition comes from the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol rather than from a general migration glossary.

Core Idea 1: The Unequal Map

The limits of simple push-pull language are explained in de Haas, Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, and in de Haas, “A Theory of Migration”. Motives can be mixed, sequential and altered by the journey. Stark and Bloom’s account of the new economics of labour migration provides the household-risk logic: families may finance migration to diversify income, not merely to maximise an individual’s wage.

The text’s statement that legal refugee categories do not reproduce the whole sociology of movement is not a criticism of having a legal definition. Protection requires a justiciable boundary. It is a warning that people can face combinations of violence, environmental stress, discrimination, debt and collapsing livelihoods while only some combinations satisfy a particular protection test.

The climate discussion follows the IPCC Working Group II assessment. Climate hazards affect displacement and migration through exposure, vulnerability, adaptation, livelihoods and conflict. The IPCC does not support treating a single large forecast as a count of future international “climate refugees”. Most weather-related displacement is internal, and many movements are short-distance or temporary.

Core Idea 2: Movement Requires the Means

The aspirations-and-capabilities approach is associated most directly with de Haas. It separates the wish to move from the resources and freedoms required to act. The manuscript deliberately avoids presenting the “migration hump” as a universal law. De Haas’s later work argues that development often increases emigration capabilities at low and middle income levels, but observed patterns differ with institutions, demography, conflict, inequality and established routes.

Selection is a standard problem in migration research. Migrants differ from non-migrants before movement, and receiving states add selection through visas, qualifications, family categories and humanitarian procedures. The text’s references to distance among refugee populations are consistent with

the broader evidence that resources, documents and networks influence who can leave an immediate region, even under forced conditions.

The distinction between freedom to move and freedom to remain is an analytical extension of the capabilities approach. It does not imply that staying is always preferable. It asks whether either outcome is chosen under tolerable conditions.

Core Idea 3: Routes Remember

Massey and colleagues' 1993 synthesis remains the foundation for the discussion of networks, migration systems and cumulative causation. Networks reduce information, housing, employment and travel costs for later movers. The resulting clustering need not be explained through a fixed national preference.

The manuscript separates smugglers from traffickers in line with the two Palermo Protocols. Migrant smuggling concerns procurement of unauthorised entry for material benefit and normally involves consent to the transport, however dangerous the circumstances. Trafficking centres on specified acts and means for the purpose of exploitation; it can occur without crossing a border. In practice, a journey can shift from one relationship to the other when debt, deception or coercion emerges.

The discussion of colonial grooves and shared-language routes draws on migration-systems research and McKeown's global history. Networks can persist because they solve practical problems, not because communities possess an unchanging disposition to migrate.

Core Idea 4: The State Makes the Immigrant

Torpey's *The Invention of the Passport* supplies the claim that modern states monopolised the "legitimate means of movement". The phrase is his. The manuscript paraphrases the surrounding argument rather than treating the passport as a single invention at a single date. Identification, passports, visas, carrier liability and administrative registration developed unevenly and accelerated during and after the First World War.

The refugee definition is based on Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention, as modified by the 1967 Protocol. The Convention covers a person outside the country of nationality who, because of a well-founded fear of persecution for a listed reason, is unable or unwilling to avail themselves of that country's protection. It separately covers a stateless person outside the former country of habitual residence who cannot or will not return because of that fear. The Convention originally referred to events before 1 January 1951 and allowed a European geographical limitation. The Protocol removed the time limit and required its parties to apply the framework without a new geographical limit, while Article I(3) allowed declarations already made under the Convention's geographical option to continue.

Non-refoulement is wider in some legal settings than the Convention refugee definition. Article 33 of the Convention is central; the Convention Against Torture and regional human-rights systems create additional bars on removal. The manuscript avoids turning those overlapping regimes into one universal test.

The account of irregular status follows common international usage. A person can become irregular after lawful entry through overstay or work outside conditions. The choice not to use “illegal immigrant” is conceptual, not an assertion that breaches of immigration law do not exist.

Core Idea 5: Work Arrives With a Status

The migrant-labour total comes from the ILO's *Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers: Results and Methodology*, published in 2024 with a 2022 reference year. The estimate covers international migrants aged fifteen and over in the labour force. Its 167.7 million total should not be compared directly with UN DESA's 2024 migrant stock without noting the different reference years, age coverage and labour-force definition.

The labour-market discussion draws principally on the US National Academies' *The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration* and Dustmann, Schönberg and Stuhler's study of Czech workers' access to parts of the German labour market. The National Academies found that

long-run effects on average native-born wages and employment in the United States were generally small, while some earlier immigrants and close substitutes could face adverse effects. The German border study found more negative local employment and wage effects under a concentrated, institutionally specific supply shock. The manuscript uses the contrast to show why scale, substitutability and adjustment matter.

The treatment of employer-tied status follows ILO reporting on sponsorship arrangements in Arab states and Ruhs's comparative analysis of migrant rights. Systems and reforms differ, so the text does not imply that every country or worker operates under identical rules. The economic point is general: a residence permission dependent on one employer reduces the credibility of exit and can increase bargaining asymmetry.

The fiscal discussion follows the National Academies and the World Bank. Fiscal estimates depend on age, earnings, family composition, eligibility rules, public-service design, discount rates and whether descendants are included. A national balance does not directly fund the municipality experiencing immediate population growth.

The care-chain point is informed by Rhacel Salazar Parreñas's work on transnational families and reproductive labour. Paid care at destination can rely on unpaid or substituted care in the worker's origin household.

Core Idea 6: Arrival Is Not Settlement

Stephen Castles's "Why Migration Policies Fail" and the history of German guest-worker recruitment support the claim that temporary labour systems often generate settlement when labour demand persists and workers acquire social ties. The manuscript does not assert that all temporary workers stay. It criticises systems that assume labour can be imported without planning for the predictable possibility of family life and duration.

The multidimensional account of integration follows the US National Academies' *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society* and comparative migration scholarship. Employment, income, education, language, housing, health, civic participation, social contact and

discrimination can move in different directions. No one measure certifies complete integration.

The Windrush account is based on Wendy Williams's independent *Windrush Lessons Learned Review*. The scandal involved people with lawful status who were unable to satisfy later documentary demands and were denied work, housing, services or re-entry, with some detained or removed. It demonstrates that status can become insecure through administrative design even when the original migration occurred under a different legal order.

Core Idea 7: Movement Remakes the Gate

The origin-country discussion draws on the World Bank, OECD and migration-development scholarship. Remittances can support consumption, education, health and investment. Their distributional effects vary. Skilled emigration can damage scarce services, while return, training incentives, trade and professional networks can create offsetting gains. “Brain drain” and “brain circulation” are hypotheses to be tested in a particular sector, not universal descriptions.

Hainmueller and Hopkins's review finds that immigration attitudes in wealthy democracies are not well explained by simple personal labour-market competition alone. Perceived national economic and cultural effects are often more predictive. Alesina, Miano and Stantcheva show substantial misperceptions about immigrants in several countries and examine how information changes attitudes. The manuscript adds the reasonable inference that rapid local change, service pressure and political framing can interact rather than operating as rival explanations.

The claim about exit and return follows Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 27: everyone is free to leave any country, and no one may be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter their own country. The Covenant creates no general right for a non-citizen to enter another state. That discretion is qualified by refugee, family, regional and other legal

obligations, which vary by regime.

The claim that policy changes behaviour draws on Massey, Durand and Pren's work on the historical United States-Mexico route as well as broader migration-systems research. Restrictions may deter, redirect, lengthen stays or alter who can afford a route. The cited backfire finding concerns a specific corridor in which stronger enforcement reduced circular return and encouraged longer settlement; it is not a claim that borders lack influence or that the result travels unchanged.

How It Actually Works

Before immigration

Torpey and McKeown supply the transition from older forms of mobility regulation to national documentary control. The text does not suggest that pre-modern rulers lacked borders or movement restrictions. It identifies a later increase in territorial reach, population registration and uniform citizen-foreigner classification.

Empires moved people

SlaveVoyages supplies the transatlantic embarkation and disembarkation estimates. David Northrup's *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism* provides the broad comparative history of Indian and Chinese indenture. Madhavi Kale, Walton Look Lai and other regional historians document coercive recruitment, penal contract enforcement, sex imbalance, settlement and return. The manuscript uses indenture neither as a synonym for slavery nor as proof of free labour in a modern sense.

Three systems of mass migration

The approximate fifty-million scale for each of three systems comes from McKeown's "Global Migration, 1846-1940". He estimates 55 to 58 million Europeans moving to the Americas and Australasia, 48 to 52 million Indians and southern Chinese moving through Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, and 46 to 51 million people moving in the northeast Asian and Russian sphere. The estimates reconstruct uneven records and should be read as ranges, not exact passenger counts.

The gate closes

The United States Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and Immigration Act of 1924 are cited from US federal historical collections. Australia's Immigration Restriction Act 1901 used a dictation-test mechanism inside the White Australia policy. Canada's Chinese Immigration Acts imposed a head tax and then exclusion. Ngai and Lake and Reynolds provide the comparative interpretation: settler states exchanged administrative techniques for racial exclusion.

The text's account of the First World War and passport normalisation follows Torpey. It does not claim that passports were absent before 1914, only that wartime controls and interwar standardisation helped make them routine and durable.

War creates the refugee

League of Nations arrangements of 1922 and later years created identity certificates for Russian and other refugees associated with Fridtjof Nansen's office. UNHCR's historical account states that fifty-two countries recognised the Nansen passport. Estimates of the number who held or benefited from the documents vary with which successive arrangements are counted, so the main text uses "hundreds of thousands" rather than an exact total.

The Partition estimate follows standard historical syntheses, including Yasmin Khan's *The Great Partition*. Roughly fourteen to fifteen million people had reached another part of the new states by 1951, while estimates

of all those driven from home can be higher because movement was rapid, repeated and poorly recorded amid violence. The text therefore gives a range and specifies the endpoint.

The treaty history comes from the Convention and Protocol themselves. The text also notes regional expansion through the 1969 OAU Convention and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration, without attempting a full legal survey.

Labour recruited, membership withheld

The Bracero Program dates, 1942 to 1964, and millions of contracts are documented by the US Library of Congress and Department of Labor historical material. Contract totals are not unique-person counts because workers could participate repeatedly.

West German agreements began with Italy in 1955 and Turkey in 1961; recruitment stopped in 1973. Rita Chin and comparative migration histories support the interpretation that employer resistance to rotation, continued residence and family reunion undermined the temporary “guest” model.

The British Nationality Act 1948 and Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 are cited from the legislation. The first established the status of Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies within the post-war imperial system; the second subjected many Commonwealth citizens to immigration control. The text compresses later nationality reforms because they belong to a fuller British history rather than this global mechanism.

Settlement defeats the temporary plan

The US Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 replaced the national-origins quota structure with a system centred on family relationships and occupational preferences, while retaining numerical and categorical controls. Mae Ngai and subsequent demographic histories supply the longer interpretation. European free movement is based on the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and Directive 2004/38/EC; it is a regional right subject to conditions, not a borderless global rule.

A global system with unequal doors

The regional examples and the distinction between authorised and irregular migration draw on UN DESA, ILO, World Bank and OECD syntheses. UNHCR supplies the refugee-hosting shares. The discussion of digital controls follows Torpey's second edition and contemporary administrative practice; it is descriptive, not a claim that all states possess integrated biometric systems.

How we know

UN DESA's methodological notes explain the international migrant stock. IDMC's *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2026* distinguishes the number of people internally displaced at year end from the number of displacement movements recorded during a year. The 2025 figures were 82.2 million people living in internal displacement across conflict, violence and disasters, and 62.2 million internal displacements during the year. The manuscript omits these totals from the narrative to avoid mixing a movement count with a population stock, but uses the distinction in the method section.

Historical limits are discussed in McKeown and migration historiography more generally. Passenger lists, contracts and official border records are strongest where states, employers or carriers had administrative reasons to count. They under-record informal movement, return, family decisions and people deliberately avoiding authorities.

What People Get Wrong

The seven corrections synthesise the evidence listed above. “Everyone is moving” uses UN DESA's stock/share distinction. “Most migrants are refugees” separates UN DESA, UNHCR and IDMC populations and explains the operational composition of UNHCR's headline total.

“Immigrants take a fixed number of jobs” relies on the US National Academies and the German-Czech natural experiment without treating either setting as universal. “Immigrants bring more crime” uses Light and Miller's US state-level study and Light, He and Robey's Texas arrest data; both are bounded by country, period and measure. “A tougher border switches migration off” treats the United States-Mexico backfire result as a route-specific behavioural response. “Temporary workers stay temporary” follows the German guest-worker record and comparative temporary-labour research. “Climate change has one refugee number” follows the IPCC and the legal refugee definition.

The crime correction does not infer offending from a foreign-national prison share. Citizenship, birthplace and immigration status are different variables, while custody also reflects policing, detention, conviction, sentence and deportation. Light and Miller analysed estimated undocumented population shares and violent crime across US states from 1990 to 2014. Light, He and Robey compared felony arrest rates among undocumented immigrants, legal immigrants and US-born citizens in Texas from 2012 to 2018. The manuscript reports what those studies found and then states why their external validity is limited.

Use It

The five lenses are a synthesis rather than a borrowed checklist. Their empirical foundations are the measurement, labour-market, legal-status, migration-systems and integration research cited above. “Level, pace and concentration” is a deliberate way to reconcile national averages with local exposure. “Trace rights into outcomes” treats legal status as part of economic causation. “Look one generation later” treats integration as an institutional test rather than a personality judgement.

Terms

Definitions are compressed from UN statistical usage, the Refugee Convention, IOM terminology, EU and national legal practice, and the scholarly sources in the bibliography. They are explanatory definitions, not legal advice. Terms such as permanent residence, naturalisation, visa and family reunification vary by jurisdiction. “Chain migration” is included because it appears frequently in political argument; the neutral mechanism is migration through family and social networks.

Go Deeper

Publication details have been checked against publisher or institutional records. De Haas was published by Viking in 2023. McKeown was published by Columbia University Press in 2008. The World Bank report was published in 2023 and is available through the Bank's open repository. Torpey's second edition was published by Cambridge University Press in 2018.

Bibliography

Primary sources, law and statistical releases

Australian Government. *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*. Federal Register of Legislation. <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C1901A00017/latest/text>. Accessed 4 September 2026.

European Parliament and Council of the European Union. “Directive 2004/38/EC on the Right of Citizens of the Union and Their Family Members to Move and Reside Freely.” 29 April 2004. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32004L0038>. Accessed 4 September 2026.

European Union. “Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Articles 20, 21 and 45.” *Official Journal of the European Union* C 202, 7 June 2016. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12016E/TXT>.

Accessed 4 September 2026.

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2026*. Geneva: IDMC, 2026.

<https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2026/>. Accessed 4 September 2026.

International Labour Organization. *ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers: International Migrants in the Labour Force*. 4th ed.

Geneva: ILO, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.54394/ESKI5420>. Accessed 4 September 2026.

International Labour Organization. “Labour Migration and Labour Mobility in the Arab States.”

<https://www.ilo.org/regions-and-countries/arab-states/labour-migration-and-labour-mobil>
Accessed 4 September 2026.

International Organization for Migration. *Glossary on Migration*. International Migration Law No. 34. Geneva: IOM, 2019.

https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf. Accessed 4 September 2026.

League of Nations. “Arrangement with Regard to the Issue of Certificates of Identity to Russian Refugees.” 5 July 1922. League of Nations Treaty Series, vol. 13, no. 355.

<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%2013/v13.pdf>.
Accessed 4 September 2026.

SlaveVoyages. “Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: Estimates.” Rice University, Emory University and partners.

<https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>. Accessed 4 September 2026.

United Kingdom. *British Nationality Act 1948*, 11 & 12 Geo. 6 c. 56.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/11-12/56/enacted>. Accessed 4 September 2026.

United Kingdom. *Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962*, 10 & 11 Eliz. 2 c. 21.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/10-11/21/enacted>. Accessed 4 September 2026.

United Nations. *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*. 28 July 1951, 189 UNTS 137.

<https://www.unhcr.org/media/convention-and-protocol-relating-status-refugees>. Accessed 4 September 2026.

United Nations. *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*. 31 January 1967, 606 UNTS 267.

<https://www.unhcr.org/media/convention-and-protocol-relating-status-refugees>. Accessed 4 September 2026.

United Nations. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. 16 December 1966, 999 UNTS 171.

<https://2covenants.ohchr.org/About-ICCPR.html>. Accessed 4 September 2026.

United Nations Human Rights Committee. *General Comment No. 27: Freedom of Movement (Article 12)*. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.9, 2 November 1999. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/366604>. Accessed 4 September 2026.

United Nations. *Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air*. 15 November 2000, 2241 UNTS 507.

https://www.unodc.org/res/human-trafficking/2021the-protocol-som_html/SOM.pdf. Accessed 4 September 2026.

United Nations. *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*. 15 November 2000, 2237 UNTS 319.

https://www.unodc.org/res/human-trafficking/2021the-protocol-tip_html/TIP.pdf. Accessed 4 September 2026.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. *International Migrant Stock 2024: Key Facts and Figures*. New York: United Nations, 2025.

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/u>
Accessed 4 September 2026.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Trends 2025*.
Geneva: UNHCR, 2026.

<https://www.unhcr.org/media/global-trends-2025-report>. Accessed 4
September 2026.

United States Congress. *Chinese Exclusion Act*. 6 May 1882, ch. 126, 22
Stat. 58. National Archives.

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/chinese-exclusion-act>.
Accessed 4 September 2026.

United States Congress. *Immigration Act of 1924*. 26 May 1924, ch. 190, 43
Stat. 153. Office of the Historian, US Department of State.

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act>. Accessed 4
September 2026.

United States Congress. *Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of
1965*. 3 October 1965, Pub. L. 89-236, 79 Stat. 911. National Archives.

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/immigration-and-nationality-act>.
Accessed 4 September 2026.

United States Library of Congress. "The Bracero Program: 1942-1964."

<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/brhc/>. Accessed 4 September 2026.

Williams, Wendy. *Windrush Lessons Learned Review*. London: Home
Office, 2020.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/windrush-lessons-learned-review>.
Accessed 4 September 2026.

World Bank. *World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and
Societies*. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2023.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2023>. Accessed 4 September
2026.

Books and reports

Chin, Rita. *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

de Haas, Hein. *How Migration Really Works: A Factful Guide to the Most Divisive Issue in Politics*. London: Viking, 2023.

de Haas, Hein, Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller. *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. 6th ed. London: Red Globe Press, 2020.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>. Accessed 4 September 2026.

Khan, Yasmin. *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Lake, Marilyn, and Henry Reynolds. *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

McKeown, Adam M. *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. *The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration*. Edited by Francine D. Blau and Christopher Mackie. Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.17226/23550>.

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society*. Edited by Mary C. Waters and Marisa Gerstein Pineau. Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.17226/21746>.

Ngai, Mae M. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Updated ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Northrup, David. *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834-1922*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

OECD and European Commission. *Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2023: Settling In*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023.

<https://doi.org/10.1787/1d5020a6-en>.

Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar. *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

Ruhs, Martin. *The Price of Rights: Regulating International Labor Migration*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Torpey, John C. *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Articles and chapters

Alesina, Alberto, Armando Miano and Stefanie Stantcheva. "Immigration and Redistribution." *Review of Economic Studies* 90, no. 1 (2023): 1-39.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdac011>.

Castles, Stephen. "Why Migration Policies Fail." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27, no. 2 (2004): 205-227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000177306>.

de Haas, Hein. "A Theory of Migration: The Aspirations-Capabilities Framework." *Comparative Migration Studies* 9, article 8 (2021).

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00210-4>.

Dustmann, Christian, Uta Schönberg and Jan Stuhler. "Labor Supply Shocks, Native Wages, and the Adjustment of Local Employment." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 132, no. 1 (2017): 435-483.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjw032>.

Hainmueller, Jens, and Daniel J. Hopkins. "Public Attitudes Toward Immigration." *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (2014): 225-249.

<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-102512-194818>.

Light, Michael T., Jingying He and Jason P. Robey. "Comparing Crime

Rates Between Undocumented Immigrants, Legal Immigrants, and Native-Born US Citizens in Texas.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, no. 51 (2020): 32340-32347.
<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2014704117>.

Light, Michael T., and Ty Miller. “Does Undocumented Immigration Increase Violent Crime?” *Criminology* 56, no. 2 (2018): 370-401.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12175>.

Massey, Douglas S., Joaquin Arango, Graeme Hugo, Ali Kouaouci, Adela Pellegrino and J. Edward Taylor. “Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal.” *Population and Development Review* 19, no. 3 (1993): 431-466. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2938462>.

Massey, Douglas S., Jorge Durand and Karen A. Pren. “Why Border Enforcement Backfired.” *American Journal of Sociology* 121, no. 5 (2016): 1557-1600. <https://doi.org/10.1086/684200>.

McKeown, Adam. “Global Migration, 1846-1940.” *Journal of World History* 15, no. 2 (2004): 155-189. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2004.0026>.

Stark, Oded, and David E. Bloom. “The New Economics of Labor Migration.” *American Economic Review* 75, no. 2 (1985): 173-178.