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NO ENTRY

Few issues excite controversy like immigration, in part because it touches on so many other questions – economics, demographics, politics, national security, culture, language and even religion. That's why it's important to go beyond the rhetoric and get to the facts and realities of international migration.

# The Migration Debate

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## By way of introduction...

It's easy to walk past the hostel in this unglamorous corner of Paris without noticing it. Open the doors and walk in, however, and the grey city street gives way to a very different world. This is Mali, or something close to it. In the hallways, men hang around in groups talking to each other. Some wear traditional boubou, or tunics, in deep blues and yellows; others wear cheap, faded denims and T-shirts. Almost all bear scars on their faces from tribal initiation rites.

Mali is present, too, in the meals these men eat, the scents of which drift up now and again from a kitchen in the basement, and in how this place is organised. Although these men are far from their home villages, they still respect their elders. As we sit talking with a group of men from the hostel, one of these elders comes in to find out what's going on. He is suspicious of visitors: the police have raided this place in the past and he doesn't want them back.

The legal status of the men who live here is not always clear. Some have French residency documents; others have not; some have permits that have expired; others have applications pending; one or two of the very few non-Malians who live here are applying for asylum. Among the men in the hostel, there are some who clearly don't want to attract the attention of the authorities. "I can return home, but there are others who can't because of their papers," says one man. "Like me", chimes in his neighbour, an older man in a tunic and with a salt-and-pepper beard. "It's been 17 years..."

Regardless of their status, the men want to work, and most do. Those who take too long to find work will eventually be asked to leave the hostel. One man explains that he was a builder back in Mali. When he came to France, he discovered that builders in Europe use cement, not the wood he was used to. "So now I am a cook," he says. "It's all a bit complicated, because I don't have my papers and so on. For all that, there is always work. But if I had my papers, I could do what I want to do. Because I want to make the most of my life, I am young."

Others are frustrated, too. "I have a salary. I can hit 1 300, even 1 400, even 1 600 euro a month," says one. "We're not asking for miracles. We just want a simple piece of paper... because to

have rights here you must have your papers.” They also want respect: “Some French people are afraid of those of us who live in these hostels. They think we’re here to take their jobs, to injure them, that we’re robbers, that we sell drugs... immigration is a stigma.”

Yet, legal or not, and respected or not, the Malians will keep coming to France. Life is even tougher back in Africa. “The droughts are worsening,” says one. “Before, two or three people could cultivate the land and feed ten. Today, all ten of those could work in the fields, and they wouldn’t produce enough to feed even themselves.”

In France, the Malians speak French, albeit not always fluently, and they have friends, and cousins, and brothers, and uncles here who can help them out as they settle in. They also know that, hard as things can be in France, they can help their families more by coming here than by staying in Mali. “We emigrate for our families, for our homes, for the people around us, for our village, not for our country,” says one. “Apart from what I need to pay rent and to eat and for transport and for taxes, at the end of the month the rest is sent home to buy medicines, rice, [and] sugar.”

The men, who come from just a few villages, have also pooled their money for collective projects back in Mali. “We are going to build small dispensaries to improve health – we’ve already built some,” explains one of the men’s leaders. “The government in Mali will find us doctors, and we will pay their salaries...”

## Migration today... and tomorrow

The stories of these Malians are, of course, particular to them, but they also have echoes in the lives of millions of other immigrants and their families around the world. For immigrants everywhere, there are factors that push them to leave their homes and pull them to a new destination. There are webs of rules and regulations that determine legal status and who can go where. There are questions of language and work: can migrants speak enough of the local lingo to get by; are their skills relevant in their new country; and can they find a decent job. And there are the links with home, the sense of duty to support families left behind.

Today, around 2.9% of people on this planet – or around 190 million – are migrants, up from around 2.2% in the 1970. Although the number of migrants has generally been rising in absolute terms, this increase has been neither rapid nor consistent – the trend line has tended to move in fits and starts, rather than smoothly. Other than that, generalisations can be of doubtful value when talking about migration. Each migrant and each country experiences migration differently. Even within countries, there can be big variations between regions, and even between towns and villages, in the numbers who leave, and the numbers who arrive. Migration is thus both a global and, at times, very local phenomenon.

### **Age of mobility**

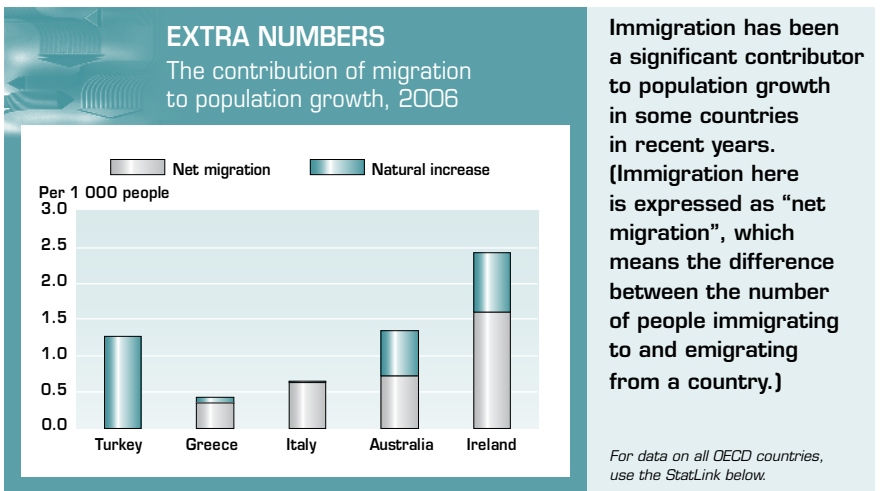
Migration has always been part of the human story, and it will remain so. In future, more and more people in both developing and developed countries are likely to consider migrating, either permanently or temporarily, to seek out new opportunities. Improvements in transport links around the world have made it easier to travel, while the Internet is an ever-expanding storehouse of information on job prospects and life in other countries. Indeed, Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, argues we are entering an age of mobility, “when people will cross borders in ever greater numbers in pursuit of opportunity and a better life. They have the potential to chip away at the vast inequalities that characterise our time, and accelerate progress throughout the developing world”.

Migrants are also likely to find themselves ever more in demand. Developed countries, like those in the OECD area, are likely to go on turning to immigrants to provide skills and expertise in areas like high-technology. Immigrants like Intel’s Andy Grove, Yahoo’s Jerry Yang and Google’s Sergey Brin have been key to the global success of California’s Silicon Valley, and there will be increasing international competition for such talent in the years to come – not least from emerging economies like India and China.

Developed countries are already using immigrants to make up shortfalls in their own workforces – especially in areas like information technology, healthcare, catering and agriculture. Migrants fill for more than a third of low-skill jobs in the United States, a share that – as in many other OECD countries – has been rising since the mid-1990s. This growth has been fuelled

in part by the fact that more and more local people are spending longer in education and becoming more highly qualified, and so are increasingly unwilling to take on unskilled work. It has also been fuelled by the fact that the average age of people in OECD countries is rising. As birth rates fall and people live longer, populations are ageing, so, in future, there will be fewer workers to support the populations of children and retirees in just about every developed country. Today in the United States, for example, there are about four people of working age for every retiree; by 2050, that ratio is forecast to fall to about two workers for every retiree. In Italy and Japan, the ratios will be closer to one to one. Migrants will continue to help to fill some of this gap.

Of course, immigrants grow old, too. Any country relying solely on migration as a quick fix for ageing societies, or to make up shortfalls in key areas like science and technology and healthcare, is likely to be disappointed. Societies will also have to pursue other policy options, such as raising retirement ages, getting more people into the workforce and improving the education and training of locals.



Source: International Migration Outlook: SOPEMI 2008.

StatLink  : <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/427158436323>

**“To face the ageing challenge, increasing labour force participation is crucial. Immigrants can be part of the solution.”**

*Angel Gurría, OECD Secretary-General  
(speech in Lisbon, September 2007)*

Naturally, demand for migrants depends in part on the state of the economy, as does the willingness of people to leave their homes and try their chances in another country. As the financial crisis began to hit the global economy in 2008, there were already signs of a slowing down in immigration in some OECD countries such as the United States. As of now, it's too early to say how substantial that slowing is or how long it may last. But there is one thing that can be said for certain: even if flows of migrants slow, they won't stop. Migration will thus continue to be an important issue for governments, which will continue to face the challenge of designing policies that ensure that migration benefits migrants, the countries they go to and the countries they come from.

### **The migration debate**

They will also have to deal with the reality that – like almost no other issue today – migration invites controversy. In part this is because it touches upon so many aspects of modern life – economics, demographics, politics, national security, social issues, national identity, culture, language and even religion. Opinion surveys show substantial antipathy to migration in many countries. In one poll for the *Financial Times* newspaper, just under half of Britons (47%) and a quarter of Spaniards (24%) said immigration from the rest of the euro area had been bad for their economy. In the United States, just over half of respondents (52%) believed immigration had done more harm than good for the economy, according to a survey for *The Wall Street Journal/NBC News*.

Such numbers don't give a real sense of the vehemence of views in what might be called “the migration debate”. Consider a few recent contributions: in Europe, a politician calls undocumented immigrants an “army of evil”; on the message board of an Irish newspaper, a reader warns that “Irish people are slipping into a minority group within their own country”; in the United States, a TV anchorman warns that “the invasion of illegal aliens is threatening the health of many Americans”, while a group advocating migration reform says

“the country’s ecology and resource base continue to be imperilled by mass immigration”. And so on...

Such statements may be misguided, but they can’t just be dismissed without some effort to try to understand what lies beneath. In many countries, concern about irregular and undocumented immigration is genuine, even if the nature of the phenomenon – especially the ways in which irregular immigrants enter countries – is not always well understood. There is also real concern about the integration of immigrants into mainstream societies. It’s certainly true that in many countries, especially in Europe, some immigrant communities have been blighted by unemployment and low levels of educational achievement. Such problems can overshadow the success stories and contributions of many other immigrants.

## What this book is about

What is the role of OECD in this debate? International migration was identified early on as a priority for the organisation, and it remains so today. All told, the 30 member countries of OECD welcome more immigrants than any other economic zone; in 2006, about 4 million immigrants settled permanently in OECD countries, about the same as in the previous year. Since the mid-1970s, the share of immigrants in the population of OECD countries has almost doubled to about 8.3%; by contrast, the share in less developed countries is much lower and, in some cases, has actually fallen. So, immigration is a major policy challenge in much of the OECD area. OECD works with member countries to find ways to meet these challenges, so that migration, whether temporary or permanent, is a positive for migrants, the societies they come to live in and the societies to which they move.

OECD’s work on migration covers many different areas. It compiles data each year on the movement of migrants in the OECD area; it studies the impact of migration on economic growth; it examines the performance of migrants in education and employment, seeking ways to ensure that immigrants – and the societies they live in – can make the most of their talents and abilities; and it analyses the role of migration in developing countries, including



the impact of the “brain drain” and remittances, or the money migrants send home to their families.

**“The increasing role of migration in economic growth and development and the importance of international co-operation make the OECD a natural forum, and the best laboratory, for the analysis of the many facets of international migration.”**

*Angel Gurría, OECD Secretary-General  
(speech in Lisbon, September 2007)*

This book offers a brief introduction to some of this work. By necessity, it can provide only a limited overview of what is a now huge body of research and analysis by OECD on international migration. To give as full a sense as possible of this work, the book includes graphics and charts from a number of OECD publications and papers as well as direct quotations from their texts. At the end of each chapter, there’s a section offering pointers to further information and reading from OECD, as well as links to other intergovernmental bodies and information sources on international migration.

**Chapter 2** looks at the long history of human migration, and brings the story up to date by introducing OECD’s data on who goes where today.

**Chapter 3** examines the rules that govern international migration, and the ways that governments seek to manage the arrival of immigrants.

**Chapter 4** looks at migrants and education – how well immigrants do in education, and what can be done to help raise low performances.

**Chapter 5** focuses on migrants and work – the track record of immigrants in the job market, the barriers that holds them back and what can be done to lift them.

**Chapter 6** looks at the role of migration in developing countries, including the impact of the “brain drain” and emigrants’ remittances.

Finally, **Chapter 7** draws some conclusions on policy options for migration, and also looks at some key issues in the measurement of migration.

## What is OECD?

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD, brings together the governments of countries committed to democracy and the market economy to tackle key economic, social and governance challenges in the globalised world economy. It has 30 member countries, the economies of which account for 68% of the world's trade and 78% of the world's Gross National Income, or GNI (a measure of countries' economic performance).

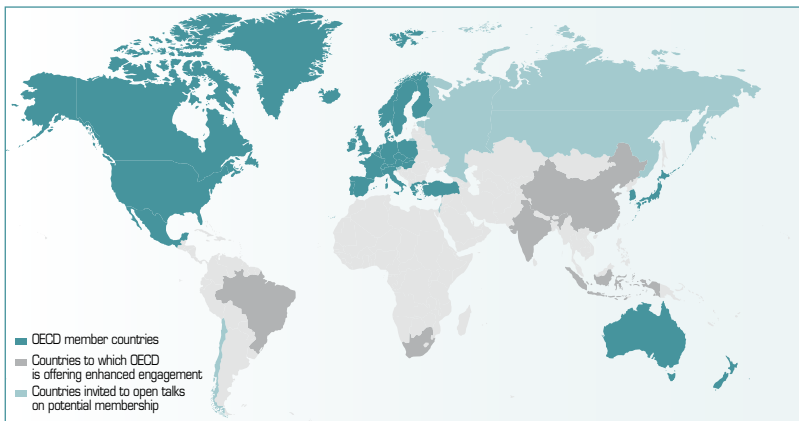
The OECD traces its roots back to the Marshall Plan that rebuilt Europe after World War II. The mission then was to work towards sustainable economic growth and employment and to raise people's living standards. These remain core goals of the OECD. The organisation also works to build sound economic growth, both for member countries and those in the developing world, and seeks to help the development of non-discriminatory global trade. With that in mind, the OECD has forged links with many of the world's emerging economies and shares expertise and

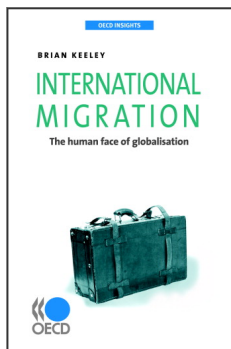
exchanges views with more than 100 other countries and economies around the world.

In recent years, OECD has also begun a process of enlargement, inviting five other countries (Chile, Estonia, Israel, Russia and Slovenia) to open talks on joining the organisation, and offering enhanced engagement to five emerging economies (Brazil, China, India, Indonesia and South Africa).

Numbers are at the heart of the OECD's work. It is one of the world's leading sources for comparable data on subjects ranging from economic indicators to education and health. This data plays a key role in helping member governments to compare their policy experiences. The OECD also produces guidelines, recommendations and templates for international co-operation on areas such as taxation and technical issues that are essential for countries to make progress in the globalising economy.

[www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)





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