

DEMOGRAPHY AND MIGRATION: AN OUTLOOK FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

By Rainer Münz

Executive Summary

Economic and demographic disparities will shape the mobility of labor and skills during the 21st century. Richer societies in Europe, North America, and East Asia already are experiencing rapid population aging. In the future, many rich countries will confront a stagnation or decline of their native workforces. The same will happen in some emerging economies, namely in China. At the same time, working-age populations will continue to grow in other emerging economies and in most low-income countries.

Despite these trends, many highly developed countries and emerging economies continue to assume that today's demographic realities will persist. Fiscal plans and social policies often are based on assumptions of stable populations or continued population growth, leaving many countries unprepared to meet the demographic realities of the future.

International migration and internal mobility are one way of addressing the growing demographic, and persisting economic, disparities. People will continue to move from youthful to aging societies, and from poorer peripheries to richer urban agglomerations. The current geography of migration will, however, change. On the one hand emerging markets with higher economic growth will provide domestic alternatives to emigration. On the other hand some countries — including China and Korea — will enter the global race for talent, and may become more attractive destinations for workers than some of today's immigrant-receiving countries that are now enduring slow or no growth and high unemployment rates.

The majority of mobile people manage to improve their income, their access to education, or their personal security. Beyond improvements in their own lives, many of them are contributing to the welfare of their regions of origin by sending money to family members or to the local community. International migration and geographic mobility within countries are the most efficient ways of lifting people out of poverty or increasing their income by giving them better access to formal and informal labor markets. However, migrants are also at risk of being exploited by employers, agents, and traffickers; or experiencing structural discrimination through labor laws, employment practices, and social security systems.

The implications for policymakers are substantial. First of all, receiving countries will have to invest more in developing smart migration, integration, and nondiscrimination policies. Secondly, cooperation in crafting migration policies at bilateral or regional levels should become a standard approach. In this context, countries should view migration policy not only as a tool to bridge labor market gaps, but also as tool of global development.

It must be stated that migration cannot mitigate all of the labor market challenges and economic disparities of the coming years and decades. Youthful and growing countries must continue their efforts to create jobs at home; aging and declining countries have to increase their efforts to raise the retirement age as well as the labor force participation of women and marginalized groups.

I. Introduction

One hundred years ago, the world population totaled just 1.5 billion people. Since then, the global population has increased almost fivefold. Today there are 7.2 billion people living on our planet.¹ Of them an estimated 232 million are international migrants, meaning people living temporarily or permanently outside their country of birth.² They represent 3 percent of the world's population. Among international migrants 59 percent live in the high-income countries of the Northern Hemisphere³ while South-South migration is also gaining momentum.⁴ Another 740 million people — or 10 percent of the world's population — are internal migrants who have moved from one region to another within their country of birth.⁵ For many people living in middle- and low-income countries, internal mobility — usually from a rural setting to an urban agglomeration — has become an alternative to emigration.⁶

Economic development during the 21st century will be characterized by higher growth in today's middle- and low-income countries and lower growth in current high-income countries. Following the trend of the last two decades, more people will be lifted out of extreme poverty; and more people will join the growing middle classes of current and future emerging economies.⁷ In many of these countries, this will almost certainly reduce emigration to Europe, North America, and Australia, or even lead to significant return migration (see Figure 3).

Demographic change in the 21st century will be shaped by decreasing birth rates and increasing life spans. These two

trends — although largely unrelated — together contribute to demographic aging at a global scale and will have ramifications for future economic output, labor markets, and welfare systems (at least in countries where such systems exist).⁸

Economic convergence and growing demographic disparities will have an impact on future migration policies, by raising the stakes in the competition for skilled and semi-skilled workers. Still, many highly developed countries and emerging economies base their economic and fiscal models on the assumption that current demographic realities — stable populations or continued population growth — will remain realities tomorrow.

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Planning and funding decisions and judgments about the sustainability of social welfare systems, such as health care and pensions, are often based on such assumptions.

In a rapidly changing demographic and macro-economic environment, it is important for policymakers to:

- 1) revisit population projections and question the demographic assumptions on which existing economic, welfare, and migration policies are based;
- 2) adapt key policy areas to the fundamental changes in global and regional population trends; and,
- 3) explore the potential of migration in bridging the gaps between youthful and aging societies and in promoting development.

This brief begins by laying out the current and projected global demographic trends, the key misunderstandings in the conventional wisdom on population trends, and what this implies for future migration flows. It then explains why these trends are important to policymakers and makes recommendations for future policy development.

II. Important Population Trends

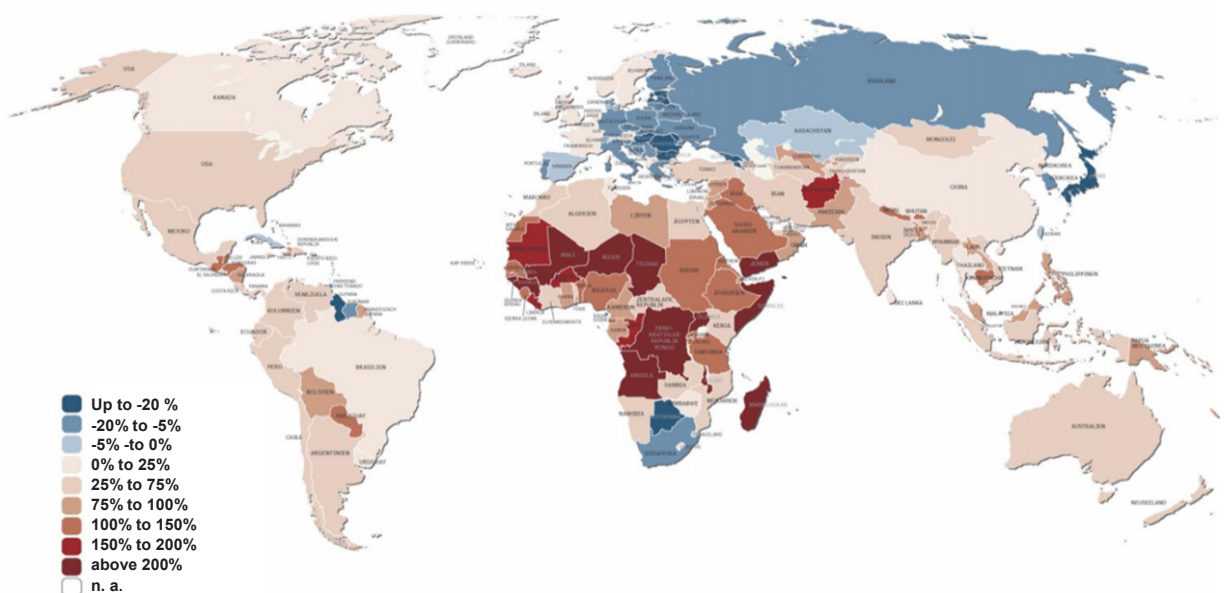
Since 2000, the world population has grown at a pace of 77 million people (roughly an additional 1.1 percent) per year.⁹ Over the next decades the pace of global population growth is projected to slow. But the number of people living on our planet will continue to rise for another 50 to 70 years, reaching

9.6 billion in 2050.¹⁰ Most population growth will be concentrated in South Asia, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa (see Figure 1),¹¹ where high fertility rates and the consequences of rapid population growth remain burning issues.¹²

After peaking at 10 billion or more, the global population will start declining toward the end of the 21st century or at the beginning of the 22nd.¹³ In some regions and countries, especially in the Northern Hemisphere, population growth already has come to an end. Over the coming decades, a growing number of countries will experience stagnating or even declining population sizes.

In the Middle East and in sub-Saharan Africa, however, many countries still will experience rapid population growth over the next decades (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Projected Change in Population Size, 2010-50



Source: Berlin Institute for Population and Development, 2010.

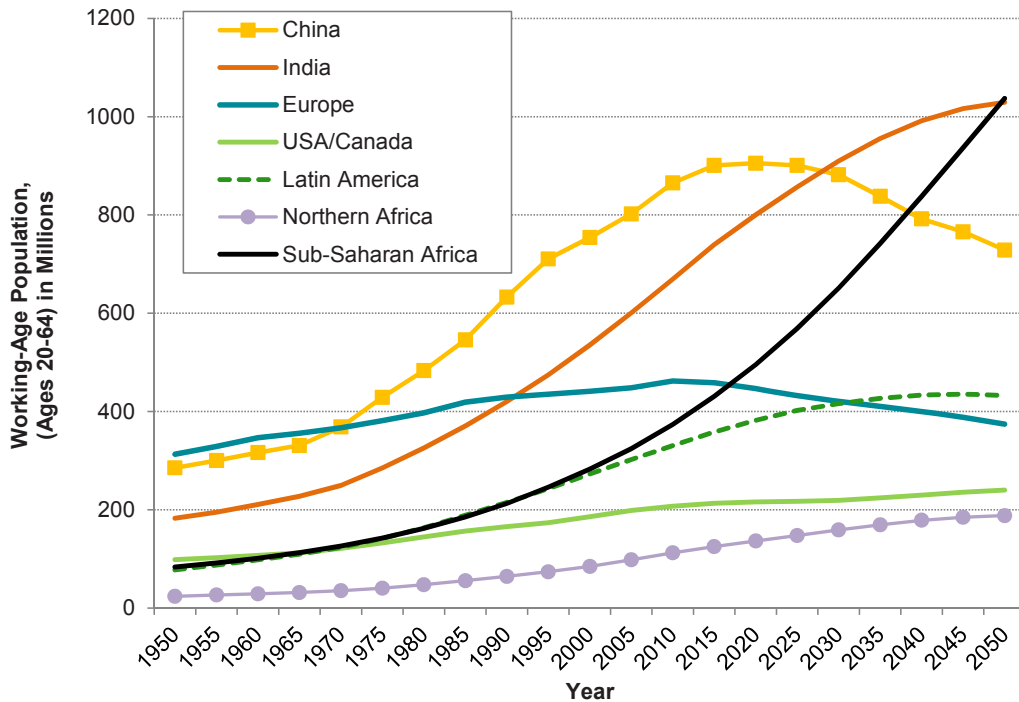
The shrinking number of children per family is the main driver of reduced global population growth.¹⁴ At first this will mean smaller cohorts of preschool and school children. Eventually, the size of the working-age population also will start to shrink.

In Japan and Russia the domestic labor force is already contracting. Europe will experience the same within the next ten years, and China will begin to see its labor force decline after 2020 (see Figure 2). In Latin America the labor force potential will start declining after the year 2045. Meanwhile, working-age populations will continue to grow in South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

In addition, the richer parts of the world are already experiencing rapid

demographic aging, while many mid- and low-income countries will soon confront it. As a result, Japan and the countries of Europe today have the oldest populations — followed by North America, Australia, and Russia. But soon the momentum of global aging will shift to today’s emerging markets — namely to China and Latin America. These developments are highly predictable. Nevertheless, many countries are not well prepared for rapidly aging societies and declining working-age populations. A number of experts assume that this will have a negative impact on economic growth, citing Japan as the most prominent example.¹⁵ At the same time declining working-age populations might create additional demand for migrant labor and skills.¹⁶

Figure 2. Changes in Size of Working-Age Population, 1950-2050



Source: United Nations (UN), Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision* (New York: United Nations, 2012), <http://esa.un.org/wpp/>.

III. Flaws in Conventional Wisdom and Implications for Future Migration and Development

What does this mean for international migration and mobility over the next decades? Conventional wisdom has it that people will continue moving from youthful to aging societies as well as from today's poorer to today's richer economies. As a result, most policy scenarios assume that the rich countries of the Northern Hemisphere will continue to attract labor and skills from abroad, and that a youthful global South will fill the ranks of an aging Europe, Russia, and North America. This, however, should not be taken for granted. The current geography of migration is likely to change. There are several reasons for this:

Increased competition for skilled labor.

More countries will soon enter the global race for talent and skills. China, for example, is already actively searching for highly qualified experts from abroad, although the number of foreign workers in China is still relatively small.¹⁷ In a not-so-distant future, China's declining working-age population might also create a demand for semi-skilled and low-skilled labor, effectively turning it from an immigrant-sending into an immigrant-receiving country, competing with Europe, North America, and Australia for workers and skills.

Changing economic growth patterns.

Economic growth has shifted from the advanced economies to middle-income and low-income countries. According to International Monetary Fund (IMF) figures, the average gross domestic product (GDP) growth of advanced economies decreased from 2.9 percent per year (1980-99) to 1.8 percent per year (2000-13); whereas in emerging

markets, annual growth increased from 3.6 percent (1980-99) to 6.1 percent per year (2000-13).¹⁸ This has practical implications for current and future migration patterns, as former sending countries gradually turn into destination countries.

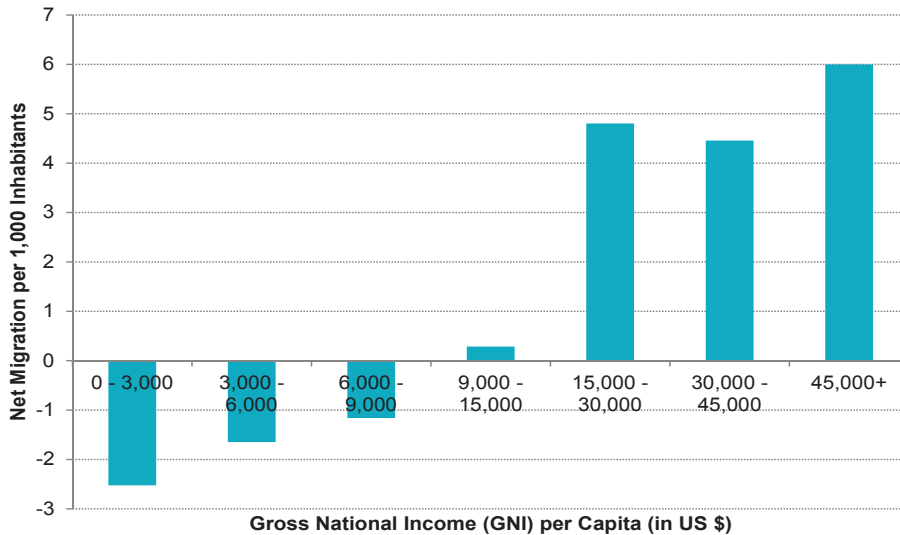
Empirical analysis for the first decade of the 21st century shows that on average, only countries with a gross national income (GNI) per capita below US \$9,000 had a negative migration balance (average annual net flows; see Figure 3).¹⁹

In countries where GNI per capita exceeds US \$15,000, net migration balances are, on average, positive (see Figure 3).²⁰ Yet, many immigrant-receiving countries of the Northern Hemisphere are encountering slow economic growth or even recession; and unemployment rates are well above historical averages. This makes them less attractive for labor migrants and their dependent family members²¹ and has already changed the direction of migration flows. For example, the European countries most affected by the financial and economic crisis — Ireland, Greece, Portugal, and Spain — recorded more emigration than immigration in 2010-12.²² Overall, as growth slows in traditional receiving countries and as GNI in many middle- and low-income countries increases, the future geography of migrant-sending countries will be different from today's geography.

More domestic and regional alternatives to overseas migration.

The improving economic situation in capital cities and other urban agglomerations of many traditional migrant-sending countries has created domestic alternatives to international migration. Usually this reflects declining population growth as well as industrialization and the emergence of urban service sectors absorbing rural migrants. The impact on international migration is clearly visible. For example, Mexico and Turkey —

Figure 3. Average Net Migration Balances (Net Flows) by Average Annual Gross National Income (GNI) per Capita, 2005-10



Source: Author's calculations based on United Nations and World Bank data (N = 170 countries).

Note: Average annual net migration rates for 2005-2010 per 1,000 inhabitants grouped by average annual Gross National Income (GNI) per capita (2005-2010) of respective countries.

both prominent sources of immigration to the United States and the European Union, respectively — are now sending significantly fewer migrants to these destinations.²³ Internal mobility toward the quickly developing urban agglomerations of these countries has become an attractive alternative to emigration.²⁴

By the same token, several emerging economies — including Angola, Brazil, Chile, Malaysia, and South Africa — are attracting migrants from neighboring countries, opening up regional alternatives for mobile people who might otherwise have looked overseas for job and career opportunities.²⁵ At the same time many middle- and low-income countries — such as Egypt, India, Pakistan, and the Philippines — continue having youthful and growing populations coupled with high unemployment. For citizens of these countries, emigration to neighboring countries and overseas destinations will continue to be a welfare-enhancing

alternative for quite some time.

Impact of migration on welfare and development. When they move, most migrants manage to improve their income, their access to education, or their personal security. As a result, international migration and internal mobility usually are the quickest way to increase mobile people's welfare and opportunities. As a significant part of this income is sent to close relatives or local communities in the country of origin, migration also has the potential to directly improve living conditions in migrant-sending regions and countries. In total, remittances to developing countries in 2012 amounted to more than US \$400 billion, which is about three times the amount that rich countries transfer as overseas development assistance (ODA).²⁶ For both migrants and sending communities, then, migration and mobility significantly contribute to poverty reduction as well as increased access to education, health services, and

food security, and in many instances, also result in a higher degree of independence.

Over time migrants also can become agents of change in their regions and countries of origin. Some are creating trade relations; others are bringing back technological change or have started investing in their countries of origin.²⁷ In a number of countries, return migrants have played an important role in promoting democracy.²⁸

With a growing demand for migrant labor and skills in aging high-income countries, the welfare-enhancing effects of international migration are likely to grow. The same is true for growing formal and informal labor markets in urban agglomerations of middle- and low-income countries.

The Possible Downside of Migration and Mobility

There are, however, a number of negative side effects. Migrants are at risk of being exploited individually, or discriminated against structurally. Employers, agents, or traffickers may be the perpetrators of individual exploitation. Migrants are sometimes paid below minimum wages, have to work unpaid overtime, and are denied the right to change their employers. Some migrants are charged excessive commissions for recruitment services, currency exchange, or for sending money to their countries of origin. Structural discrimination occurs through the labor laws of destination countries, recruitment and promotion practices of employers, or tax and social security systems that collect contributions from migrants but exclude them from certain public services or social transfers.²⁹

International migration and mobility are

also potentially causing brain drain from rural peripheries to urban centers and from low-income countries to emerging and developed economies. Socioeconomic development of migrant-sending regions clearly suffers from the selective emigration of younger, better-educated, and more ambitious people. At the same time, the discrimination against migrants in labor markets of destination countries leads to brain waste, and over time, to dequalification.

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Some of these risks can be mitigated through circular and return migration. Return migration not only raises the possibility of reversing the brain drain; mobile people often return to their communities with newly acquired skills, networks, and ideas for investment supporting further development in source countries.³⁰ Governments can address other risks by setting and enforcing minimal wage levels, offering mechanisms for social protection, and enacting and enforcing labor and recruiting standards.

IV. Implications for Policymaking

The changing economic and demographic realities of the coming decades will have major implications for future employment and migration policies:

- Governments in countries with youthful and growing populations have an interest in reducing unemployment by enabling emigration and encouraging a steady flow of remittances. They should also try to engage their diasporas in the former homeland.

- Governments in middle-income countries with economic growth will develop an interest in facilitating return migration and preparing for the future immigration of third-country nationals.
- Governments in high-income countries with aging societies and stagnating or declining working-age populations will need more investment in sound, forward-looking migration policies. Many developed countries accustomed to easily finding the labor and skills they require will need to think more strategically about how to attract qualified workers.
- Tighter competition for skills will put more focus on the education systems of both sending and receiving countries to supply needed human capital to the global labor market. In this context, mutual recognition of educational attainments and skills based on comparable standards would be extremely helpful.
- Developing middle- and low-income countries are at risk of losing native talent and skills through emigration. Countries can mitigate this risk by forming long-term recruitment agreements that include a commitment by migrant-receiving countries to invest in the educational systems of particular sending countries. Such a step would improve the quality of education and increase the number of graduates. Receiving countries should help develop and broaden the skills base in sending countries before attracting or recruiting large numbers of skilled migrants.
- However, international migration remains only one possible answer to fu-

Many developed countries accustomed to easily finding the labor and skills they require will need to think more strategically about how to attract qualified workers.

ture mismatches between the supply and demand of labor and skills. Countries with aging populations must also consider other policy options to protect the size of their shrinking workforces — such as increasing the retirement age and the labor force participation of women. At the same time, countries and regions with youthful and growing populations will have to continue their efforts to unleash their economic potential and to create jobs.

Increased demand for labor and greater global mobility of human capital will make

it ever more important for sending countries to invest in protecting the rights of their citizens living and working abroad. For sending countries the aim is clear: they should encourage receiving countries to

implement labor laws as well as minimum labor and social security standards that apply to natives and immigrants alike. At the same time, such a non-discriminating approach will make receiving countries more attractive in the future race for talent. Sending and receiving countries should also come to agree on minimum social security coverage for migrants as well as on the portability of acquired rights and benefits.

Cooperation at the bilateral, regional, or even multilateral level offers policymakers at all points of the migration process — sending, transit, and receiving countries — the opportunity to craft smarter policies that aim to create mutually beneficial solutions, reduce the costs, and mitigate the risks of migration. However, while most sending countries have adopted liberal migration policies facilitating travel and emigration, receiving countries usually

see migration control as a key element of their sovereignty. As a result, immigrant-receiving countries generally have “unilateral” admission policies which are aligned neither with other receiving countries nor with sending countries. As a result bilateral agreements or mobility partnerships only play a minor role in most migration policymaking.

Consequently there are very few occasions for representatives of sending and receiving countries to share their views or to find common ground — unlike the international dimension of policymaking on trade, energy, or climate change. As global patterns of mobility shift, governments should look for new opportunities to collaborate on migration that will support economic growth in both sending and receiving countries.

Lack of cooperation between migrant-sending and receiving countries increases the costs of migration and decreases the positive effect on socioeconomic development. Direct (and sometimes excessive) costs relate to visa and passports, recruiting and travel agencies, exchange commissions, fees of money transfer companies, and more. Indirect costs are related to labor market discrimination leading to lower incomes (compared to native workers with similar skills); the reduced portability of acquired social rights and benefits, which lead to lower (or no) pension payments; lower health insurance coverage; and reduced

access to unemployment benefits.

Future migration policies should aim at reducing the direct and indirect costs of migration. At the same time they should aim to maximize the possible benefits of migration by reducing wage discrimination and employment of migrants below their skill levels. Better jobs and higher wages of migrants will directly translate into higher remittances.³¹

We can assume that the global competition for qualified and skilled workers will become stiffer in the coming decades, which will in turn expand the range of employment opportunities for people living in youthful and demographically growing

societies. However, the sharpened competition for talent also increases the risk of disrupting the development of middle-income and low-income countries by the emigration of native talent and skills.

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Regardless of the route governments choose, many policies that address demographic change and the subsequent fundamental shifts in labor supply require a time horizon well beyond an electoral cycle. It is therefore crucial for decision makers to consider and invest in long-term solutions that can be adapted to meet the changing needs of their economies and societies.

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