1
The Match and Motive Matrix

Key messages

• This Report defines migrants as people who live outside their country of citizenship, regardless of their status and motivations. For practical purposes, the term is used throughout the Report when referring to economic migrants and refugees as a group.

• The Match and Motive Matrix draws from labor economics and international law to develop a unified framework that identifies priority policies for four types of movements based on who moves and under what circumstances (figure 1.1).

• Where a migrant fits in the Match and Motive Matrix depends in part on the policies of the destination countries. Over time, the challenge is to enhance migration outcomes by strengthening the match of all migrants’ skills and attributes with their destinations and by reducing the need for so-called distressed movements by migrants who are neither refugees nor whose skills and attributes are a strong match for the destination society.

Figure 1.1 Distinct groups of migrants require distinct policy responses

Source: WDR 2023 team.

Note: Match refers to the degree to which a migrant’s skills and related attributes meet the demand in the destination country. Motive refers to the circumstances under which a person moves—whether in search of opportunity or because of a “well-founded fear” of persecution, armed conflict, or violence in their origin country.
A people-centric approach

Migration is about people. It is about those who cross borders, those who stay behind, and those who receive them. When people move to a new country, their decision to move has economic and social consequences for themselves, their communities of origin, and their destinations.

A people-centric approach to migration recognizes that migrants and refugees are men and women who make often difficult choices and deserve fair and decent treatment. They are people with identities, skills, cultures, and preferences. Similarly, destination countries are complex societies with diverse and at times conflicting constituencies, interests, and decision-making processes. As sovereign nations and as members of the international community, they design policies to further their own interests. When people decide to move across borders, their movements affect the development and prosperity of both origin and destination societies.

Migration has proved to be a powerful force for development, improving the lives of hundreds of millions of migrants, their families, and their communities across the world. However, it also entails migrants and refugees, their dependents, and many people in destination communities overcoming a range of issues and vulnerabilities and possibly needing development support to do so. Some of the long-term drivers of mobility have been strengthening, and they are expected to intensify further in coming decades. At the same time, an intense public debate is under way in many destination countries about the costs and benefits of receiving migrants and refugees.

The challenges and tensions associated with cross-border mobility arise because the choices and preferences of stakeholders are often misaligned. They differ between the people moving across borders and the citizens of destination countries; among migrants; and among constituencies in both the origin and destination societies. However, the market mechanisms needed to reconcile these competing interests are often missing. For example, for some categories of workers in high demand, market forces may lead to excess emigration from the standpoint of the origin society (brain drain). Conversely, for other categories, immigration flows may be larger than what destination societies find optimal. Strong development outcomes require policies in both the origin and destination societies to address such mismatches and ensure improved economic and social outcomes for all.

A focus on foreign nationals

This Report defines migrants as people who live outside their country of citizenship, regardless of their status and motivations. The distinct challenges migrants face arise from their lack of citizenship in the destination country—and the associated civil, political, and economic rights. In response to migrants’ lack of citizenship, destination countries must adopt policies dedicated to defining their status, the rights they can enjoy, and the opportunities they can access. From the perspective of this Report, a person ceases to be a migrant upon returning to his or her country of citizenship or upon naturalization in the destination country (box 1.1).

This Report looks specifically at international migration. Domestic and international movements respond to some of the same economic and social forces. In fact, globally the number of internal migrants significantly exceeds that of international migrants. But because people who have crossed an international border lack citizenship at their destination, they find themselves in a situation fundamentally different from that of internal migrants. Governments’ policy responses to domestic and international
Box 1.1 Foreign nationals or foreign-born?

Many statistical databases and research studies define migrants as “foreign-born” people because most censuses, population registers, and surveys include a question on place of birth. By contrast, information on citizenship is not collected systematically, and in some cases respondents may be reluctant to share their legal status if, for example, they are undocumented. In some countries, the census authorities are even prohibited from asking about citizenship status.⁹

Yet defining migrants as “foreign-born” is not equivalent to defining them as foreign nationals. “Foreign-born” implies that being a migrant is a lifelong status that will never change, not even through naturalization or full cultural and political integration. It also implicitly establishes differences among citizens based on their personal history. In countries where the terms migrant and alien are synonymous, discrimination can be perpetuated or reinforced. By contrast, a focus on foreign nationality makes it possible to better isolate the specific challenges that stem from lack of citizenship.

In practice, use of the “foreign-born” definition results in the categorization of larger numbers of people as migrants, which, in turn, influences perceptions, politics, and policy making in destination countries. For example, even though a relatively large number of migrants are eventually naturalized, under the “foreign-born” definition they are still counted as migrants. In the United States, 54 percent of foreign-born people are naturalized citizens, and the numbers are high as well in many high-income member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (figure B1.1.1). Large discrepancies between the number of foreign-born and the number of foreign nationals also arise from changes in borders. For example, following the breakup of the Soviet Union and of Yugoslavia, some people who were born in what once was a unified country found themselves counted as “foreign-born” if they ended up living in another part of the country when it became independent. For an older generation, the partition of British India generated significant population movements, and it still accounts for as many as 2 million “foreign-born” people.

The limitations of the “foreign-born” definition of migrants become obvious when considering the many political leaders who happened to be born in a foreign country and yet are prominent citizens of their nation. Among them are former king Juan Carlos of Spain, former presidents Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria, Ian Khama of Botswana, and Toomas Ilves of Estonia, and former prime ministers Tony Abbott of Australia, Manuel Valls of France, Manmohan Singh of India, Shimon Peres of Israel, Boris Johnson of the United Kingdom, and Moana Carcasses Kalosil of Vanuatu, to name just a few.

(Box continues next page)
Box 1.1  Foreign nationals or foreign-born? (continued)

**Figure B1.1.1** In many high-income OECD countries, over half of foreign-born people have been naturalized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Naturalized</th>
<th>Nonnaturalized</th>
<th>Intra-EU migrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>44%</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
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<td>63%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Norway</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
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<td>17%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
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<td>27%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
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<td>26%</td>
<td>52%</td>
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<td>31%</td>
<td>69%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Refugees are included in “nonnaturalized” in the calculation of their share of the foreign-born. EU = European Union; OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

a. For example, the US Supreme Court in Department of Commerce v. New York, 139 S. Ct. 2551; 204 L. Ed. 2d 978 (2019), blocked the Trump administration’s intention to ask about citizenship status on the 2020 census form. The citizenship question has been absent from the US Census since the 1950 round.
Two perspectives: Labor economics and international law

Labor economics and international law inform policy making on migration. Their perspectives arise from distinct intellectual and scholarly traditions, and they focus on different aspects of cross-border movements. As a result, each provides important insights, and yet until now there has been no simple framework to integrate them into a coherent whole.

Both labor economics and international law recognize that the policies of destination countries play the primary role in shaping migration patterns and effects. These countries define and regulate, albeit imperfectly, who crosses their borders, who is legally allowed to stay and under which conditions, and what rights those who cross their borders are granted. These policies greatly affect migrants’ incentives and decisions before their departure, during their journey, and after their arrival, shaping all aspects of global mobility. By contrast, most origin countries have little sway in regulating movements.

When destination countries set their migration policies, they focus primarily on their own welfare. Through their political process, they consider both the effects of migration on their labor markets and (because they are not just markets) the broader impacts of migration on their society. Only to a much more limited extent do they consider impacts on migrants and origin countries.

Labor economics and cost-benefit calculations

Labor economics views migration as the movement of workers across borders to countries where their labor can be employed more productively than in their origin country. Market forces drive the movement of factors of production—capital and labor—and their allocation across countries. From this perspective, the free movement of people is a key element of the efficient functioning of the global economy, and labor should be allowed to move where it is most productive without the introduction of friction by national borders and other policy restrictions. Nationals of destination countries who are negatively affected by migration—such as workers who compete with migrants in the labor markets—can be supported through distributional policies.

Labor economics focuses on the skills, qualifications, and professional experiences that migrants bring to the destination country and the extent to which these can be used productively. Some migrants bring skills that complement those already available in the labor market. This complementarity increases productivity, with substantial benefits spread across the destination country’s economy. In other occupations, migrant workers are substitutes. Their arrival expands the labor supply, thereby lowering wages and overall production costs. Consumers and employers (and the owners of capital) gain, but some existing workers experience lower wages and possibly unemployment. The distinction between complementary and substitute skills is based not on the level of skills, but on how much they match the needs of the labor market: both high skills and low skills can be complements or substitutes.

There is ample empirical evidence that when migrants’ skills match the needs of the destination labor market, the migrants benefit as well, as do their countries of origin. Because they can be employed more productively than in their country of origin, migrants earn higher wages. Countries of origin benefit from both financial transfers (remittances) and knowledge transfers. But there are also costs, such as when large numbers of people with scarce skills emigrate (brain drain). However, they tend to be of a smaller order of magnitude.

This perspective has been further developed by recognizing that migrants bring not only skills but also a range of other attributes, including their personal histories and cultural preferences. The match of their skills with the needs of destination economies largely determines labor market effects. Their integration, however, goes beyond the labor market. It may entail financial costs, such as if migrants’
families require education and health services. Depending on a migrant's job, age, and family situation, these costs may or may not be fully covered by his or her taxes. Other costs may arise as well, including nonmonetary costs such as for migrants' social integration.

What is considered a strong match depends on both migrants’ characteristics and the destination society’s preferences. But these characteristics and preferences change over time, such as when economic growth accelerates or slows down. Distinct constituencies in the destination society may also have different views on the costs associated with migrants’ integration, especially for social inclusion. Yet both skeptics and supporters agree that some migrants’ skills and attributes better match the needs of the destination society than others. The debate is about what constitutes a stronger match and a weaker match. This question is typically arbitrated through political processes, and what is viewed as a desirable outcome evolves over time.

Overall, many destination countries derive their migration policies from a cost-benefit calculation. When migrants’ profiles match the needs of the destination society, their contributions exceed the costs of their integration (figure 1.2). In this situation, destination societies enjoy a net gain—and in most situations migrants and countries of origin do as well—and they tend to allow or even encourage such movements. By contrast, when migrants’ profiles do not match the needs of destination societies, the costs may exceed the benefits from their labor contributions. Migrants themselves may benefit, but destination countries experience a net loss, and therefore they try to discourage these movements.

**International law and the obligation to protect**

Under international law, the choice of who is admitted into state territory is a matter of state sovereignty. Countries decide who to let in and under what status. This decision can be made unilaterally or through specific agreements between states, such as international conventions, regional free movement agreements, or bilateral labor agreements. Norms are drawn from various sources and fields of law, such as consular and diplomatic protection, the law of state responsibility, international human rights law, international refugee law, and international labor law and standards. They apply differently to distinct groups of migrants, and they are unevenly implemented at national levels.
Human dignity and rights are at the core of international law, including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (the 1951 Refugee Convention), as well as a range of complementary legal instruments. They also underpin key international norms, including the 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees, the International Labour Organization Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, and the central promise of the United Nations’ 2030 Global Agenda for Development and its Sustainable Development Goals to “leave no one behind.” Acknowledging migrants as people implies that these norms fully apply to them whether they are in transit, at a border, or in a destination country. Particular attention should be paid to those facing daunting challenges, such as women and girls in some circumstances, LGBTQ+ individuals, unaccompanied children, and victims of racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination.

In a world of sovereign states, all persons are under the protection of their country of citizenship. Regardless of where a person lives, his or her rights are assured either by the country of citizenship or through an agreement between the country of citizenship and the country of residence. The protection of a state guarantees “the right to have rights,” as political philosopher Hannah Arendt famously declared in 1948. But situations can arise in which a country is unwilling or unable to protect the rights of some of its citizens because of, for example, conflict or persecution.

International law defines such people as “refugees.” Refugees are people who can demonstrate a “well-founded fear” of harm if they were to return to their country of origin. Their status is protected under the 1951 Refugee Convention as well as regional refugee law instruments. Socioeconomic vulnerability does not enter into this definition. Some refugees are wealthy, although in many cases being a refugee leads to economic deprivation. Conversely, many people who are vulnerable do not require international protection even though they may need material assistance.

At the core of international protection is the principle of non-refoulement: refugees shall not be sent back to their country of origin or to another country where they would be at risk of harm (figure 1.3). This principle applies regardless of the costs to the hosting country. International protection also includes a set of specific rights refugees can enjoy in the country in which they are hosted until they regain full protection, as citizens or permanent residents, from either their origin country or another country.

**Figure 1.3** When people have a “well-founded fear” of harm if they return to their country of origin, destination countries are obligated to host them

Source: WDR 2023 team.
Note: Motive refers to the circumstances under which a person moves—whether in search of opportunity or because of a “well-founded fear” of persecution, armed conflict, or violence in their origin country.
The Match and Motive Matrix

The perspectives of labor economics and international protection have not been reconciled. Labor economics provides insights into the economics of migration, but it struggles to explain movements that do not follow labor market forces such as forced displacement. The legal protection discourse, with its focus on protecting the life and dignity of refugees, does not fully address the economic and social effects in host countries other than in an instrumental manner to maintain support for refugee protection.

The Match and Motive Matrix provides a unified framework that overlays the distinctions made by labor economics—between movements that represent a net gain and those that represent a net cost for destination countries—and by international law—between situations in which destination countries have the discretion to accept a migrant and situations in which they have an obligation to host a refugee.

Four types of movements

The Match and Motive Matrix distinguishes between four types of movements (figure 1.4):

- **People who are seeking opportunities in the destination country and whose skills and attributes strongly match the needs of the destination society**—the upper-left quadrant in figure 1.4. This category, by far the largest, includes most economic migrants and their families. These migrants can be at all levels of skills—Indian engineers working in California's Silicon Valley as well as South Asian construction workers employed in countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). They also include large numbers of undocumented migrants whose skills and attributes fill gaps in the destination labor market even if the migrants do not have a legal status in the country of destination. For all these migrants, labor economics suggests that migration yields net gains—for themselves, their country of origin, and their country of destination.

- **People who are moving out of fear of persecution or serious harm in their country of origin and whose skills and attributes strongly match the needs of the destination society**—the upper-right quadrant in figure 1.4. This group is mainly composed of refugees who have skills in demand at the destination. It is exemplified by theoretical physicist Albert Einstein, who had to flee Europe during World War II and became a refugee. Today, many professionals who left the Syrian Arab Republic, República Bolivariana de Venezuela, or, more recently, Ukraine are part of this group, as well as Afghan truckers in Pakistan or Somali traders in East Africa. Under international law, destination countries are obligated to host these people, but the countries also benefit from their presence.

- **People who are moving out of fear of persecution or serious harm in their country of origin but whose skills and attributes weakly match the needs of the destination society**—the lower-right quadrant in figure 1.4. Most people fleeing conflict or persecution are in this group. Some receive formal refugee status, but others do not, such as the Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals in Bangladesh. The weak match may reflect individual characteristics, such as unaccompanied minors who are too young to work and yet need support. Or it may be a consequence of government policies, such as not allowing some people to work and thus to contribute. Providing these people with international protection is both important and an obligation under international law, but it has a net cost for the destination country. The policy challenge is to manage this cost.

- **People who are seeking opportunities in the destination country but whose skills and attributes weakly match the needs of the destination society**—the lower-left quadrant in figure 1.4. This group is typically composed of migrants who engage in distressed and irregular movements that often involve significant risks and suffering. It includes some of those who arrive at the US southern border
or the northern Mediterranean shores, as well as in a host of low- and middle-income countries. Their presence imposes net costs on the destination countries, which have the discretion to accept or return them. This group raises some of the most complex policy trade-offs.

Fluidity between types of movement

Where migrants appear in the Match and Motive Matrix is shaped in part by destination countries’ policies (figure 1.5). For example, migrants’ ability to contribute to their destination society and the strength of the corresponding match depend on their skills and attributes as well as on the demand in the destination labor market. However, it also depends on whether they are permitted to work at the level of their qualifications. For example, a medical doctor who is not allowed to work in her field—whether because her qualifications were not recognized or because she was altogether prevented from working in the formal sector—will contribute less than if she could work as a doctor. The strength of the match can also evolve over time based on the changing labor needs and social dynamics in the destination country.
Similarly, the degree to which migrants are provided with protection—and are accepted regardless of the economic benefits of their presence—depends on destination countries' policies. Beyond their obligations under international law, a number of countries have put in place legal frameworks to provide protection to specific groups who are allowed to enter or stay in their territory for humanitarian reasons. Other countries do not have such legal instruments.

**Policy priorities**

Migration policies can help improve the outcome of cross-border movements for migrants, countries of origin, and countries of destination by adopting approaches tailored to the specifics of each situation. Based on the insights from labor economics and international law, the Match and Motive Matrix identifies policy priorities for all groups (figure 1.6):

- **People whose skills and attributes strongly match the needs of destination societies:** *Maximize gains at origin and destination.* When migrants and refugees bring skills that are in demand at their destination, the benefits outweigh the costs for the countries of destination, countries of origin, and the migrants and refugees themselves, regardless of status—whether migrants are documented or not. It is also true regardless of motive—whether migrants arrived in search of opportunities or as refugees fleeing persecution and violence. The challenge for both destination and origin...
countries is to design and implement measures that further increase the benefits of migration and effectively address its downsides.

- **People who move out of a “well-founded fear” of persecution or conflict but whose skills and attributes are a weak match for the needs of destination societies:** Ensure sustainability and share the costs. When such people's skills and attributes are a weaker match, the socioeconomic costs may exceed the benefits for the destination country. Yet there is an obligation to host refugees. The challenge for the host country is to adopt policies that can reduce the costs. The challenge for the international community is to ensure adequate responsibility-sharing because refugee protection is a global responsibility.

- **People who seek opportunities in the destination country but whose skills and attributes are a weak match for the needs of this country:** Absorb or return distressed migrants humanely. For people whose skills are not a strong match in the destination country and who are not entitled to refugee protection, destination countries face a difficult trade-off. Accepting these migrants entails economic and social burdens, but denying them entry can endanger their basic human rights. The destination country may decide to return them to their origin country. But it should also recognize that some of these migrants have protection needs—for example, if they are fleeing gang violence—and treat them accordingly. In any case, they should be treated humanely.

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**Figure 1.6** The Match and Motive Matrix helps to identify policy priorities for distinct groups of migrants

Source: WDR 2023 team.

**Note:** Match refers to the degree to which a migrant's skills and related attributes meet the demand in the destination country. Motive refers to the circumstances under which a person moves—whether in search of opportunity or because of a “well-founded fear” of persecution, armed conflict, or violence in their origin country.
Making migration better

Over time, the challenge is to strengthen the development outcomes of migration so that all—destination societies, origin societies, and the migrants themselves—can benefit. In a world where migration is increasingly necessary for countries at all levels of income, making migration better requires moving on two complementary fronts (figure 1.7):

- **Strengthen the match of all migrants’ skills and attributes with the needs of destination societies.** The benefits of migration—for both origin and destination societies as well as for migrants—are significantly higher when migrants can contribute more to their destination society, when they can earn higher wages, and when they can transfer larger remittances (and knowledge) to their countries of origin. All this requires both providing legal channels for entry of those who have adequate skills—at all levels—and attributes and allowing them to engage in the formal labor market. It may be complemented by building skills in the country of origin—to serve both the global and the domestic labor markets and in the process to mitigate the negative impacts of high-skilled migration (brain drain), which may need international support. Achieving better matching of skills often requires cooperation between the countries of destination and origin.

**Figure 1.7** The challenge for countries is to enhance the match of migrants and reduce distressed movements

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*Source: WDR 2023 team.*

*Note: Match refers to the degree to which a migrant’s skills and related attributes meet the demand in the destination country. Motive refers to the circumstances under which a person moves—whether in search of opportunity or because of a “well-founded fear” of persecution, armed conflict, or violence in their origin country. The dashed vertical line in the lower-left quadrant highlights the distinction between distressed migrants who have some needs for international protection and those who do not.*
• *Reduce the need for distressed movements.* Such movements are often associated with considerable suffering for the migrants themselves. Irregular transit can turn into traumatic ordeals. Upon arrival, migrants face challenges in entering the labor force because their skills do not match the needs of the destination society, and they are often in situations of acute vulnerability. In many countries, distressed movements have polarized the migration debate. Reducing the need for such movements requires strengthening people’s resilience in countries of origin; enhancing their skills so they can be better matching the demands in the destination labor market; and recognizing the need of some of these migrants for complementary modes of protection.

**Notes**

2. Regular migration is the movement of persons that occurs in compliance with the laws of the countries of origin, transit, and destination. Irregular migration is the movement of persons that occurs outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the states of origin, transit, and destination.
3. OHCHR (1951, art. 1).
4. OHCHR (1951, art. 33).

**References**

