Overview

Migration has been part of the human experience since the earliest days of civilization. *Homo sapiens* left Africa’s Omo Valley some 200,000 years ago, and since then humans have never ceased to move, producing distinct cultures, languages, and ethnicities. Migration has proved to be a powerful force for development, improving the lives of hundreds of millions of migrants, their families, and the societies in which they live across the world. But there are challenges as well—for migrants, their countries of origin, and their countries of destination.

This Report defines migrants as people who live outside their country of nationality (box O.1)—whether they moved in search of better economic opportunities or were displaced by conflict or persecution (refugees). It does not consider as migrants people who have been naturalized in their country of residence. It is the lack of citizenship—and of the associated civil, political, and economic rights—that creates distinct challenges for migrants and policy makers, not the fact that people moved at some point in their life.

The Report proposes a framework to best manage the economic, societal, and human impacts of migration. Combining insights from labor economics and international law, it looks at the degree to which migrants’ skills and attributes are in demand at their destination (match) and whether they seek opportunities or fear for their lives in their country of origin (motive). It distinguishes between four different types of movements and identifies priority policies and interventions to fully realize the development benefits in all situations. To make change happen, international cooperation is critical—and so is empowering new voices that can change the nature and tone of the current debates.

**Box O.1 How many migrants are there, and where do they live?**

Today’s cross-border movements are characterized by their diversity: there is no typical migrant or typical origin or destination country. Migrants differ by their reasons to move, their skills and demographic characteristics, their legal statuses, and their circumstances and prospects. There are countries of origin and countries of destination at all levels of income, and, in fact, many countries are simultaneously both origin and destination, such as Mexico, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom.

As defined in this Report, there are globally about 184 million migrants (about 2.3 percent of the world’s population)—37 million of them refugees:

- About 40 percent (64 million economic migrants and 10 million refugees) live in high-income countries that belong to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). These are high- and low-skilled workers and their families, people with an intent to settle, temporary migrants, students, as well as undocumented migrants and people seeking international protection. This number includes 11 million European Union (EU) citizens living in other EU countries with extensive residency rights.
Migration is necessary for all countries

Migration is a response to shocks and global imbalances, such as the massive gaps in income and well-being across countries. Economic migration is driven by prospects of higher wages and access to better services. In 2020, about 84 percent of migrants lived in a country that was wealthier than their own. Yet moving has costs that most poor people cannot afford. Largely from middle-income countries, most migrants are not among the poorest or the wealthiest in their country of origin.

Demographic changes have sparked an intensifying global competition for workers and talent. Consider three countries. Italy, with a population of 59 million, is projected to shrink by almost half, to 32 million, by 2100, with those above age 65 increasing from 24 to 38 percent of the population. Mexico, traditionally an emigration country, has seen its fertility rate drop to barely replacement level. Nigeria, by contrast, is expected to expand its population from 213 million to 791 million, becoming the second-most populous country in the world, after India, by the end of the century (figure O.1).

Such trends are already having profound impacts, changing where workers are needed and where they can be found. Regardless of politics, wealthy countries will need foreign workers to sustain their economies and honor their social commitments to older citizens. Many middle-income countries, traditionally the main sources of migration, will soon need to compete for foreign workers—and many are not ready to do so. Low-income countries have large numbers of unemployed and underemployed young people, but many of them do not yet have skills in demand in the global labor market.

Climate change is compounding the economic drivers of migration. About 40 percent of the world’s population—3.5 billion people—live in places highly exposed to the impacts of climate change: water shortages, drought, heat stresses, sea level rise, and extreme events such as floods and tropical cyclones. Economic opportunities are dwindling in affected regions, amplifying vulnerabilities and fueling pressures for migration. Climate impacts are threatening the habitability of entire regions in places as diverse as the Sahel, low-lying Bangladesh, and the Mekong Delta. In some Small Island Developing States, these impacts are forcing leaders to contemplate planned relocations. Most of the movements attributed to climate change have so far been over short distances, mainly within a
country. But this may change. Whether and how much climate change will amplify international movements in the coming decades depend on the global and national policies for mitigation and adaptation adopted and implemented now.

Meanwhile, conflict, violence, and persecution continue to drive large numbers of people out of their home countries. The number of refugees has more than doubled over the last decade.  

Figure 0.1 Widely different demographic forces are at play in Italy, Mexico, and Nigeria

a. Italy’s population is aging, inverting its demographic pyramid

b. In Mexico, the demographic transition is well under way and is expected to accelerate

c. Nigeria will remain young well through the middle of the century

Forced displacement and economic migration patterns are largely distinct. Refugee movements are often sudden and rapid. Because refugees aim for the closest safe destination, they are concentrated in a small number of neighboring host countries. Refugees also include large numbers of vulnerable people—children account for 41 percent of the total.

In the face of such forces, migration needs to be managed so that its development benefits can fully materialize. Current approaches often fail both migrants and nationals. They create large inefficiencies and missed opportunities in both destination and origin countries. At times, they lead to human suffering. In many countries at all income levels, broad segments of society are challenging migration as part of a broader discourse against globalization.

A practical framework for policy makers: The Match and Motive Matrix

Migration entails both benefits and costs—for the migrants, the origin countries, and the destination countries. For all, favorable outcomes depend on migrants’ individual characteristics, the circumstances of their move, and the policies they face. Yet countries have unequal roles in setting such policies. Most origin countries have little sway in regulating movements. By contrast, destination countries define and regulate who crosses their borders, who is legally allowed to stay, and with what rights. They encourage some movements and discourage others. Their policies largely shape the impacts of cross-border movements.

Labor economics and international law provide the two main lenses to understand migration patterns and to design the appropriate migration policies. These two 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.

Labor economics focuses on the “match” between migrants’ skills and related attributes and destination countries’ needs (figure O.2, panel a). The starting point for migration policies in many destination countries is a simple question: Does migration yield benefits that exceed the costs? Migrants bring skills for which there are different levels of demand. The more migrants’ skills match the needs of the destination labor market, the larger are the gains for the destination economies and the migrants themselves—and often for the origin countries as well (through remittances and knowledge transfers). This applies regardless of skills level and legal status. But migrants also use public services, and they must be integrated into a society that can be unfamiliar. Both involve costs, at least in the short term. The net gains can thus be either positive or negative.

Under international law, migrants’ motives determine destination countries’ obligations. Countries decide which migrants to let in and under what status as a matter of state sovereignty (figure O.2, panel b). Yet when people flee their country because of a “well-founded fear” of persecution, conflict, or violence—and when they cannot return without risking harm—they are entitled to international protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the cost-benefit calculations by destination countries no longer apply. Under international law, these people are refugees, and they are not to be returned to their country of origin regardless of the cost of hosting them. There are other migrants who require special support because they face daunting challenges, such as some women and children (especially girls), LGBTQ+ people, and victims of racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination. In fact, some people move for a combination of reasons, blurring the strict distinction between refugees and economic migrants. The need for international protection provides a second lens through which migration policies should be viewed as they are designed.
This Report offers an analytical framework that incorporates both dimensions—match as well as motive. It distinguishes between four types of movements, and it identifies policy priorities for each situation (figure O.3):

- **Economic migrants with a strong match** (upper-left quadrant). Most migrants move in search of better opportunities and choose destinations where they are likely to be a strong match. Their movement generates substantial development benefits for the migrants, the destination country, as well as the country of origin, regardless of their legal status. There are costs as well, but they are typically smaller. For such movements, the interests of all parties are generally aligned. The policy goal should be to further increase the benefits and to reduce the costs.

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**Figure O.2  Two perspectives on cross-border migration**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Match</th>
<th>Motive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stronger</td>
<td>Low need for international protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaker</td>
<td>High need for international protection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source**: WDR 2023 team.

**Note**: Panel a: Match refers to the degree to which a migrant’s skills and related attributes meet the demand in the destination country. Benefits include greater economic output, a larger tax base, and a greater availability and affordability of some goods and services. Costs include greater demand for public services, effects on competing workers, as well as the costs of economic and social integration. Panel b: 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. Under the 1951 Refugee Convention, those who have such fear are entitled to a refugee status and shall be provided with international protection. They cannot be returned to their country of origin or to a country where they would face inhuman or degrading treatment or other irreparable harm (non-refoulement principle).
Figure 0.3 “Match” determines the net gains of receiving migrants; “motive” determines their international protection needs

- **Refugees with a strong match** (upper-right quadrant). Some refugees have skills and attributes that match the destination country’s needs, even though they are moving out of fear and not to seek opportunities. Their movement brings to the destination society the same development benefits as those brought by voluntary migrants. The policy goal should be to further increase net gains.
- **Refugees with a weak match** (lower-right quadrant). Many refugees bring skills and attributes that are a weak match with the needs of the destination society. They choose their destination based on their immediate need for safety, not labor market considerations. Yet under international law they must be accommodated, regardless of the costs. The policy goal for the destination country should be to reduce these costs and to share them internationally.
- **Distressed migrants** (lower-left quadrant). Other migrants neither qualify as refugees nor are a strong match at their destination. Their aggregate numbers are not large, but their movements are often irregular and unsafe, raising significant challenges for destination countries. The term *distressed migrants*, as they are called in this Report, is an acknowledgment of the circumstances

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.
under which they move, not a normative category. Some of these distressed migrants, while not refugees, may still have protection needs on humanitarian grounds or otherwise. Others may be returned to the country of origin—but they must be treated humanely.

Where migrants stand in the Match and Motive Matrix is determined in part by destination countries’ policies. For example, the match of a migrant’s skills and attributes with the needs of the destination country depends on whether that migrant has the right to work at the level of his or her qualifications. The match can evolve over time, based on changing labor needs, economic regulations, and social norms in the destination country. Similarly, the determination of who should receive international protection varies significantly across countries within the broader parameters of international law.

Ultimately, government policies should aim to both maximize the development gains of migration—for the migrants, origin societies, and destination societies—and provide refugees with adequate international protection. Over time, policies should aim to strengthen the match of all migrants’ skills and attributes with the needs of the destination societies so that the benefits can be further increased. They should also aim to reduce the need for distressed movements, which often entail considerable suffering.

### When the match is strong, the gains are large

When migrants bring skills and attributes in demand in the destination country, the benefits typically outweigh the costs, regardless of motives, skill levels, or legal status. These migrants fill gaps in the destination labor market, with benefits for the destination economy, as well as for themselves and their origin country. There are costs as well, both social and economic, but they typically are much smaller than the benefits. Both destination and origin countries can design and implement policies that further increase the gains and address the downsides (figure O.4).

### Destination countries should not let social and cultural controversies overshadow the economic gains of migration

Migrants can contribute much to the destination economy’s efficiency and growth, especially over the long term. Low-skilled migrants perform many jobs that locals are unwilling to take, or for which they would ask wages above what consumers are willing to pay. High-skilled migrants—nurses, engineers, scientists—improve productivity across many sectors of an economy, although only four countries—Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States—account for over half of all tertiary-educated immigrants. About 17 percent of health care workers in the United States, 12 percent in the United Kingdom, and 79 percent in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are foreign-born. Consumers benefit from lower production costs and the lower prices of some goods and services. The long-term benefits of immigration include increased entrepreneurship and innovation, stronger links for international trade and investment, and better provision of services such as education and health care. Migrants’ contributions are larger when they are allowed and able to work formally at the level of their qualifications and experience.

In many countries, however, the controversy is not about economics; it is about the social and cultural impacts of migration. When migrants stay for an extended period of time—or permanently—the question of their integration becomes central. Sociocultural impacts are a function of the size of the migrant group, its origin, its socioeconomic standing, as well as the perceptions of citizens toward migrants—and sometimes their racial prejudices. Sociocultural impacts are also a function of each
country’s sense of identity and social contract. Some countries, such as Canada, define themselves as societies shaped by migrants and their descendants, while others, such as Japan, emphasize their ancient roots.

This debate plays out in a context in which societies and cultures are neither homogeneous nor static. There is no “pre-migration” harmony to return to. In every society, tensions, competition, and cooperation have always existed across a variety of groups that are partly overlapping and constantly changing. Some of these tensions reflect socioeconomic divides: they are not about migration but about poverty and economic opportunity—and large numbers of migrants happen to be poor. Because many of those who moved or their descendants have been naturalized, some of the cultural issues attributed to migration are, in fact, about the inclusion of national minorities. Migration is also just one of many forces transforming societies in an age of rapid change, alongside modernization, secularization, technological progress, shifts in gender roles and family structures, and the emergence of new norms and values, among other trends. Integration happens eventually, and it is facilitated by economic inclusion and nondiscrimination policies.

Figure 0.4 When the match is strong, policies in both destination and origin countries can maximize the gains of migration

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.
Destination countries should actively address the actual downsides of migration. The more closely migrants’ skills and attributes match the needs of the destination labor market, the smaller are their effects on nationals’ wages. Yet even if the average effects are limited, some workers—those whose skills are similar to migrants’—may lose wages or even jobs, and they need support.\(^{30}\) When a destination country must accommodate large numbers of foreign children, especially if they are not fluent in the local language, additional resources are needed to maintain the quality of education.\(^{31}\) Public investment should be increased in neighborhoods where migrants live to reduce poverty and discrimination that otherwise can lead to residential segregation and a range of social ills as experienced in France or Sweden.\(^{32}\) In most countries, migration increases fiscal revenue by expanding the tax-paying workforce, thereby creating space for the necessary spending.\(^{33}\)

**Most migrants benefit greatly—even more so when they have rights in their destination country**

Most economic migrants—both low- and high-skilled—fare much better in destination countries than if they had stayed in their origin country. Because migrants aim to maximize the benefits of their movement, they deliberately choose destinations where their skills are in demand. They find opportunities they would not have had in their country of origin, earn higher wages, and often access better services. These gains increase substantially over time, especially if the destination economy is growing and its labor market functions well. Those who return to their country of origin—about 20–50 percent of the total in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) high-income countries—are better off than before their departure.\(^{34}\)

Migrants face challenges as well. The financial costs of moving are very high in some situations, and migrants have to work years to repay them.\(^{35}\) Tens of millions of migrants are separated from their families, and many are at risk of social isolation in unfamiliar settings.\(^{36}\) The absence of parents raises challenges at home—such as for children’s education—with potential long-term consequences.\(^{37}\)

The benefits of migration are larger when migrants have a legal status and formal employment rights in line with international labor standards. Examples are the right to decent work, to fair recruitment,\(^{38}\) and to an ability to change employers when new opportunities arise.\(^{39}\) Once they have such rights, migrants’ wages and the quality of their jobs converge with those of nationals much faster than if they are undocumented, and they face less pressure to take on lower-skilled and lower-paying jobs than their skills warrant.\(^{40}\) They can travel more easily, and, as a result, they can better maintain connections with family members in their country of origin. They are also less vulnerable to abuse and discrimination. By contrast, in destinations where legal protection is inadequate, or where migrants cannot access it because of information and language barriers, they are at increased risk of exploitation.\(^{41}\)

**Origin countries should actively manage migration for its development benefits**

In origin countries, emigration can support poverty reduction and development—especially if it is well managed.\(^{42}\) Remittances are a stable source of income for migrants’ families, supporting investments in children’s education, health care, housing, and entrepreneurial activities. These benefits could be amplified by lowering the costs of sending remittances.\(^{43}\) In many cases, migrants, returnees, and diaspora communities transfer ideas, knowledge, and technology, spurring job creation and modernization—just as US Silicon Valley expatriates did when they helped nurture India’s information technology sector.\(^{44}\) This process is easier when the origin country has sound economic policies
that foster a favorable business climate, efficient labor market policies, solid institutions, and business ecosystems into which entrepreneurs can tap.

High-skilled emigration from low-income countries—the so-called brain drain—can inflict losses and create development challenges. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific, people with a tertiary education are 30 times more likely to emigrate than those who are less educated. This emigration can aggravate a shortage of skilled workers to provide essential services, such as health care. Because governments cannot prevent people from leaving, they need to expand the training capacity for such skills. This effort could be supported through coordination with destination countries, including to finance higher education and training programs. In essential sectors such as health care, additional measures may be necessary, such as minimum service requirements enforced through bilateral labor agreements with destination countries. Parallel economic and social reforms are needed to ensure that skilled workers have attractive prospects and can be employed at their full capacity in their origin countries.

Origin countries benefit most from labor migration when they make it an explicit part of their poverty reduction strategy. Governments can facilitate orderly movements through labor agreements with destination countries, improved labor market information systems, fair recruitment processes, and consular support to citizens abroad. They can also work to reduce remittance and migration costs and support returning migrants as they reenter the labor market and society. They can adjust education systems to build the low and high skills in demand globally so that their citizens can obtain better jobs if they migrate and thus contribute more through remittances and knowledge transfers. Such initiatives have proved fruitful in several countries such as Bangladesh and the Philippines, although much remains to be done.

**When the match is weak, the costs need to be shared—and reduced—multilaterally**

When migrants do not bring skills and attributes in demand at their destination, the costs to destination countries exceed the benefits. If there are gains for migrants and origin countries, these gains are not sustainable unless destination countries take action to reduce and manage their own costs (figure O.5). The policy challenges are different for refugees, who under international law must be hosted by the destination countries, and for other migrants who move under distressed circumstances.

**Refugee situations should be managed as medium-term development challenges and not just as humanitarian emergencies**

Supporting refugee-hosting countries through a succession of emergency responses is both costly and ineffective. On average, the international community spends US$585 a year for each refugee hosted in a low- or lower-middle-income country, in addition to the expenditure incurred by host governments. The way in which international support is delivered often creates incentives for short-term approaches. Yet current refugees have been in exile for an average of 13 years, and millions live in limbo for decades. For example, many Afghans who left their country after the 1979 Soviet invasion are still in exile today, and so are their children and grandchildren. Humanitarian aid is critical to meeting immediate needs, but policy making, from the outset of a crisis, should aim for responses that can be sustained over time, both financially and socially.
Taking a medium-term approach can both reduce hosting costs and allow refugees to rebuild their lives. The 1951 Refugee Convention obligates states to provide refugees with safety, but also with access to jobs and essential services. Those who flee conflict and persecution often have severe vulnerabilities, including loss of assets and a traumatic experience, which can be compounded by an uncertain status. Many cannot work, such as children or people with disabilities or undergoing trauma. But, if given a chance, most refugees look for ways to improve their lives and contribute to their hosting economies, much in the way other migrants do. This effort can be best supported by giving refugees the right to work, supporting them in accessing jobs, and including them in national education and health systems—with adequate external support. This approach has been adopted in countries as diverse as Colombia, Niger, Poland, Türkiye, and Uganda, among others.

Internal mobility—letting refugees move within destination countries to places where there are jobs and services—can further transform the response to refugee situations. Many refugees are hosted in lagging borderland areas, where opportunities are scarce and where they form a large share of the population. Their presence can impose significant burdens on host communities. But other approaches are possible, as demonstrated by the support some countries have provided to displaced Venezuelans and Ukrainians, for example. In these situations, refugees are allowed, and even encouraged, to move across the entire host country and even within regional blocs. This freedom strengthens their match.

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**Figure O.5** When the match is weaker, policy making involves trade-offs for the destination country between economic gains and migrants’ dignity

![Figure O.5](image)

*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.*
with the needs of the destination societies because they can access more opportunities. It also lessens pressures on host communities because refugees are more evenly spread across the entire population. Such an approach requires a shift in the way assistance is provided, moving toward adopting predictable medium-term financing, formulating policy support, and strengthening national institutions to provide international protection.60

Hosting refugees contributes to a global public good. All nations should therefore help absorb the costs of hosting, but many do not. The vast majority of refugees live in only a dozen countries, typically low- and middle-income countries bordering the countries of origin.61 For example, in Jordan and Lebanon refugees make up a large share of the total population. Three donors provide almost two-thirds of bilateral financing for assistance to refugees globally,62 and four countries account for almost three-quarters of all resettlements.63 This narrow base of support should be broadened by engaging new constituencies, including development organizations, local authorities, the private sector, and civil society. Responsibility-sharing can also be part of broader bilateral negotiations, such as on trade access under the Jordan Compact64 or investment under the Ethiopia Job Compact.65 It could be complemented by regional initiatives, including in low-income contexts. For example, in the Horn of Africa the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has helped develop a regional peer-to-peer process to gradually improve the management of refugee situations.66

Distressed migration needs to be reduced while respecting people’s dignity

The most difficult policy challenges arise when migrants are neither refugees nor a strong match for the destination society. Many of these migrants turn to irregular channels and to the growing smuggling industry and the exploitative labor market it feeds in destination countries.67 These movements often entail suffering. Since 2014, nearly 50,000 people have died while attempting to migrate.68 Many have perished while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea, and deaths on other routes are also increasing. These movements have also created a sense of loss of control over borders, and they undermine the fragile consensus on the treatment of regular migrants and refugees. To deter such movements, some governments have implemented harsh policies, such as family separation at the US southern border in 2018 or externalization of border controls to third countries with dubious human rights records.69 All of these responses come at a significant cost to the dignity and human rights of migrants and would-be migrants.

Some distressed migrants have protection needs, even though they are not refugees. They take life-threatening risks that suggest they have no viable alternatives in their country of origin, or they fall prey to human trafficking while moving. For example, undocumented migrants on their way to the US southern border face kidnapping, extortion, and sexual and other forms of violence from criminal gangs.70 In the face of what has become a series of human and political crises, several countries have developed ad hoc legal instruments to provide a form of protection for people who are not recognized as refugees but cannot be safely returned to their country.71 This approach is sometimes referred to as complementary or subsidiary protection. Such schemes should be extended in a coherent manner, and safe, legal routes should be established to access protection.

Destination countries may choose to return other distressed migrants to their countries of origin. Still, human dignity must remain the yardstick of migration policies. Deportations are a tragedy for the individuals involved, yet they may be necessary to ensure the sustainability of the migration system because they demonstrate to citizens and would-be migrants alike that rules will be enforced. Involuntary returns should be executed in conformity with human rights conventions and in a humane manner.
They should be accompanied by parallel efforts to crack down on both smugglers and those who employ irregular migrants at the destination.

When destination countries adopt restrictive policies, their neighbors can also be affected, especially those through which migrants are transiting. Transit countries become substitute destinations when barriers prevent migrants from moving onward. Distressed migrants stay for months, and at times years, in countries where they did not wish to end up and where they are often vulnerable. This situation raises difficult policy issues for transit countries such as Mexico or Morocco that they cannot address alone. Both the destination and transit countries should work together to absorb distressed migrants or return them humanely (however, return should not apply to refugees for whom the 1951 Refugee Convention applies). This cooperation includes designing mechanisms to determine who should be absorbed in which country—destination or transit—and who should be returned, as well as agreeing on the corresponding processes and financial arrangements to do so effectively. Such arrangements may be complemented by efforts to scale up services and safety in countries in which migrants are merely passing through.

Overall, the main challenge is to reduce the need for such movements (figure O.6). Development plays a critical role in that respect by changing who migrates and under what circumstances.\(^7\) As countries

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**Figure O.6** Policy actions in both origin and destination countries can reduce distressed migration

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.
develop, people become better educated, and their skills better match the needs of domestic and global labor markets. They also become more resilient to shocks, and the availability of decent work and domestic migration alternatives reduce the need for distressed cross-border movements. But development takes time, and shorter-term responses are also needed. Destination countries can cooperate with origin countries and expand legal pathways for entry to enable or even incentivize movements by people whose skills and attributes match their needs, including lower-skilled workers. In the process, they shape the incentives of would-be migrants and the communities that support them, such as for acquiring specific skills.

Making migration work better requires doing things differently

Now is a difficult time for migration reform. Political debates have become polarized in many countries, at all levels of income. Tensions within the international community increased following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. The global economic outlook remains uncertain. Yet reforms are needed urgently. Difficult debates lie ahead, but they cannot be avoided or delayed if the gains from migration are to be realized.

Stronger international cooperation is essential: Bilateral to enhance migrants’ match and multilateral to respond to movements driven by fear

Both origin and destination countries need to manage migration strategically. For origin countries, the challenge is to maximize the development impacts of labor migration on their own societies. For destination countries, the challenge is to recognize and harness the potential of migration to meet their long-term labor needs, while treating all migrants humanely and addressing social impacts that raise concerns among their citizens.

To increase the benefits they derive from migration, origin and destination countries need to work together (figure O.7). Cooperation can be formalized through bilateral labor agreements that facilitate better matching of skills and provide those who move with legal status, such as between some Pacific Island states and Australia. Bilateral cooperation can help build globally transferable skills in origin countries such as through Global Skills Partnerships. Bilateral cooperation is also critical to process involuntary returns humanely. It can be complemented by regional initiatives—for example, to discuss labor needs across a group of countries of origin and destination or to create regional schemes for recognizing qualifications, such as the Single Market and Economy (CSME) initiative of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Multilateral efforts are also needed to address movements motivated by fear, both to strengthen global norms and to share the costs of hosting refugees. The international legal architecture for migration and forced displacement—and for defining who should receive international protection—has been evolving over the last decades to reflect changes in the patterns of movements. Likely to continue, it should include a strong development perspective. But at a time of renewed tensions in the international community, progress may be slow. Global action should be complemented by regional efforts—in particular, to share responsibility for hosting refugees and other forcibly displaced people—as Latin American countries did by allowing Venezuelan nationals to move across the region.

To make change happen, underrepresented voices must be heard

Migration reform is a political process. Data and evidence are essential for successful reforms, but they are not sufficient. New stakeholder groups need to make their voices heard. This is especially important
when debates are highly polarized and when there are multiple competing priorities—among them, climate change, food security, and an ongoing global economic slowdown.

In both origin and destination countries, the debates should engage broad segments of society beyond elite circles. This effort can be pursued by taking a whole-of-government approach beyond security agencies, by inviting the private sector and labor unions to assess medium-term labor needs and how to meet them, and by engaging with local authorities, which are often at the forefront of the response and integration challenges. Migrants’ and refugees’ voices should be heard as well, which requires developing systems to channel them in ways that ensure representation and accountability. Low- and middle-income countries—including origin countries for economic migrants and refugee-hosting countries—can also form constructive coalitions to get their perspectives better heard and defend their interests.

A message of hope

This Report conveys a message of hope. Amid a debate dominated by ideological arguments about whether migration is good or bad, it tries to answer a different question: how can migration work better for global development? The answer requires recognizing both the potential benefits and the challenges—economic, societal, and human—that emerge when people cross borders. Migration is neither universally good nor universally bad. It is complicated and necessary, and it needs to be better managed (table O.1 and see chapter 9 for further details). Whenever and wherever it is well managed, migration is a powerful force for prosperity with benefits for all: economic migrants, refugees, and those who stay behind, and for origin and destination societies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHEN MIGRANTS’ AND REFUGEES’ SKILLS ARE IN DEMAND (STRONG MATCH)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>COUNTRY OF ORIGIN</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Manage migration for poverty reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Remittances.</strong> Leverage remittances for poverty reduction and reduce their costs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge.</strong> Work with the diaspora and returnees to spur knowledge transfers and to strengthen integration in the global economy.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Skills development and brain drain mitigation.</strong> Expand education and training in skills that are in demand in both the national and global labor markets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protection.</strong> Provide citizens abroad with protection. Support vulnerable family members left behind.</td>
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<tr>
<th>WHEN REFUGEES’ SKILLS ARE NOT IN DEMAND (WEAK MATCH, FEAR MOTIVE)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HOST COUNTRY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage with a medium-term perspective and enhance the match</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutions and instruments.</strong> Mainstream refugee support through line ministries. Develop sustainable financing frameworks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal mobility.</strong> Facilitate and encourage refugees’ movements toward opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-reliance.</strong> Enable refugees to access jobs in the formal labor market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inclusion in national services.</strong> Deliver education, health, and social services to refugees through national systems.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHEN MIGRANTS’ SKILLS ARE NOT IN DEMAND (WEAK MATCH, NO FEAR MOTIVE)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>COUNTRY OF ORIGIN</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce the need for distressed movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resilience.</strong> Enhance social protection. Create domestic alternatives to international migration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education.</strong> Build skills that allow people to have more options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inclusion.</strong> Promote inclusive and green development. Foster adaptation to climate change.</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>MAKING MIGRATION POLICY DIFFERENTLY</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DATA AND EVIDENCE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harmonization.</strong> Harmonize data collection methods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence-building.</strong> Invest in new types of surveys to inform policy making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open data.</strong> Encourage research by making data widely available, while respecting migrants’ and refugees’ privacy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: WDR 2023 team.
Notes

1. Armitage et al. (2011); Beyer et al. (2021).
2. See chapter 2 for further details.
3. See chapters 4–6 for further details.
4. Also see chapter 3 for further details.
5. Black, Kniveton, and Schmidt-Verkerk (2011); Black et al. (2011); McLeman (2016).
7. See chapter 3 for further details.
8. IPCC (2022).
9. Cissé et al. (2022); IPCC (2022, chap. 7).
10. Clement et al. (2021); Rigaud et al. (2018).
16. See chapter 4 for further details.
18. OHCHR (1951), article 33.
19. On the Match and Motive Matrix, see chapter 1.
20. See chapter 2 for migrant population numbers.
21. See chapter 6 for further details.
24. See chapter 6 for further details.
25. See chapter 6 for further details.
26. See chapter 6 and spotlight 6 for further details.
27. See chapter 6 for a discussion on the social and cultural impacts of migration.
32. Auspurg, Schneck, and Hinz (2019); Baldini and Federici (2011); Baptista and Marlier (2019); Bosch, Carnero, and Farré (2010); Fonseca, McGarrigle, and Esteves (2010).
34. Bossavie and Özden (2022); Dustmann and Görlach (2016); OECD (2008).
35. See chapter 5 for more on the costs of migration.
36. Graham and Jordan (2011); Mazzucato et al. (2015); Parreñas (2001).
38. ILO (2019).
41. ILO (2016); ILO, Walk Free, and IOM (2022); UNDP (2020).
42. See chapter 5 for further details.
43. See chapter 5 for further details.
44. Chanda and Sreenivasan (2006); Docquier and Rapoport (2012); Kerr (2008).
47. See chapter 5 for further details.
48. Ang and Tiongson (2023); Bossavie (2023).
49. OECD (2021).
50. See chapter 7 for further details.
54. Hussam et al. (2022).
55. Rossiasco et al. (2023).
56. IDA (2021, 162).
57. EWSI (2022).
59. IDA (2021, 9).
60. See chapter 7 for further details.
61. As of the end of 2022, the top 12 refugee-hosting countries by number of refugees hosted were Türkiye, Colombia, Germany, Pakistan, Uganda, the Russian Federation, Poland, Sudan, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Lebanon. See Refugee Data Finder (dashboard), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, https://popstats.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/.
62. These are European Union institutions, Germany, and the United States (OECD 2021).
63. These are Canada, Germany, Sweden, and the United States (OECD 2021).
64. Government of Jordan (2016).
66. IGAD (2022).
67. See chapter 8, box 8.4, for further details.
68. IOM (2020).
69. See chapter 8, box 8.1, for further details.
70. Infante et al. (2012).
72. See chapter 8 for further details.
76. See chapter 8 for further details.
References


EWSI (European Web Site on Integration). 2022. “Poland: Parliament Adopts Law on Assistance to Ukrainian


