

International Migration

This week's readings:

- Lustgarten (2020), "The Great Climate Migration Has Begun" (*NYT/ProPublica*)
 - Adhikari (2013), "Conflict-Induced Displacement" (*AJPS*)
 - Penn Wharton Budget Model (2016), "The Effects of Immigration on the U.S. Economy"
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What is international migration?

The UN defines an **international migrant** as anyone living outside their country of birth for ≥ 12 months. Here are a few categories that are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive:

- **Economic or labor migrants:** Migrants who seek work or education (some definitions encompass family unification).
- **Climate (or environmental) migrants:** Migrants who have been displaced by rapid-onset disasters or slow-onset degradation.
- **Asylum-seekers & refugees:** Migrants who are fleeing persecution or conflict; protected under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

The UN estimates that there are about 300 million migrants, or about ~3% of humanity. Most movement is *regional*: 69 % of refugees reside in a neighboring state.

Why do people migrate?

Adhikari (2013) shows individuals weigh expected benefits against costs and uncertainty.

- **Push factors:** War, repression, climate stress, economic downturns.
- **Pull factors:** Higher wages, safety, networks, political rights.
- **Constraints:** Distance & terrain ("tyranny of distance"); Capital requirements (smugglers, visas); Policy barriers (walls, quotas).

Consider also that sensitivity toward each of these factors differs depending on individual characteristics (risk tolerance, whether one has a family, etc.)

Conflict displacement

- Conflict produces both **refugees** (cross-border) and internally-displaced persons (**IDPs**) (within-country).
- Adhikari finds *actual violence* and *perceived threat* raise flight probability and that *local economic loss* (land seizure, crop theft) is nearly as influential.
- Social networks can either facilitate flight (by providing information) or provide reasons to stay (emotional ties and so on.)

Climate migration

There is no international legal status for climate migrants.

- Lustgarten (2020) projects that, under high emissions, >30 m people may head for the U.S. border by 2050; globally, 150 m could be displaced by sea-level rise alone.

Policy dilemma:

1. **Accommodation:** expand legal pathways, invest in managed retreat.
2. **Fortification:** walls, externalization of asylum processing.

Outcome depends on whether northern states treat migration as adaptation or threat.

Economic migration

Economic migration is predicted by

- Large income differentials and sector-specific labor demand in host country
- In the source country, recessions, youth unemployment, credit constraints, demographic shifts, and climate-related agricultural shocks drive emigration.

tl;dr persistent wage/productivity gaps are the root driver of economic migration.

Economic consequences in host states

- **Labor markets:** Long-run wage impacts on natives \approx zero; earlier migrants bear most competition, but there may be distributional consequences.
- **Productivity & innovation:** immigrants patent at $2\times$ native rate; 50% of Fortune 500 firms founded by immigrants / children (why might this be?)
- **Fiscal effects:** Positive at national-level; mixed locally where low-income immigrants increase education and other local spending.
- **Remittances:** >\$620 b (2023), often countercyclical lifelines for origin economies.

Popular attitudes toward migrants

Model	Core concern	Prediction
Egocentric	personal job & wage competition	low-skill natives oppose low-skill migrants
Sociotropic	national economy	broad opposition to low-skill inflows
Cultural	identity, religion, race	hostility toward culturally distant groups
Humanitarian	empathy, deservingness	support for vulnerable

Climate disasters can temporarily boost pro-migrant sentiment (Arias & Blair 2022), but effects fade.

Migration policy variation

1. Global South asylum rules are becoming more inclusive. Drivers:
 - Neighbour civil war \rightarrow anticipate inflow \rightarrow adopt procedures.
 - Discrimination against elites' ethnic kin abroad \rightarrow liberalize to aid co-ethnics.
2. High-income states increasingly trade foreign aid & visas for border control (EU-Turkey deal; U.S.–Mexico enforcement). There is little evidence that **transactional aid** reliably “buys” containment (Arar 2017).

Mixed migration & the policy puzzle

Economic, conflict, and climate drivers often intertwine. Example:

- drought \rightarrow crop failure \rightarrow livelihood loss \rightarrow conflict over scarce resources \rightarrow violence.

Appendix: migrant categories vs. legal protection

Category	Primary Driver	Explicit Treaty Protection
Refugee	Persecution / conflict	1951 Refugee Convention
IDP	Same as above, but internal	UN Guiding Principles (soft law)
Economic migrant	Jobs, study, family	Domestic immigration law
Climate migrant	Environmental change	None (ad hoc)

Table 1: Protection gap for climate migrants