

Key Findings

- A fundamental motivation for international migration is betterment, with people moving between countries to forge better lives for themselves and their families. This can relate to access to better education, health care, or income generation, the long-term benefits of which can be shared via remittances.
- Media and political debate often focuses on migration from the least developed to the most developed nations. But while most international migrants (79% or 190 millions) do reside in very high HDI countries, their countries of origin present a more complex picture, with comparatively few coming from the poorest nations.
- Of the top 20 emigration countries in 2020, 16 were high or very high on the Human Development Index (HDI), and none were low HDI nations (refugee-origin nations excluded). The highest number of migrants (86 million) emigrated from high HDI countries, followed by very high HDI nations (76 million).
- Visa policies have evolved between 1995 and now, resulting in border control and entry policies that have become stricter – and more polarized – meaning that over time more barriers to international mobility have emerged for people from low HDI countries.
- Many people from the least developed nations are increasingly denied the opportunity for betterment and economic advancement through migration as they are unable to access such options because of high visa requirements and costs. This divide risks further exacerbating poverty and inequality between the richest and poorest.
- When geographic areas of free movement are established, States and people utilize them to great benefit. For example, over the long term, nations in the visa-free Schengen area in Europe experienced much higher levels of mobility growth than non-Schengen nations. The ECOWAS agreement in West Africa has also led to increased migration within the area, and decreased migration outside of that bloc.

Takeaway for Policy

This analysis makes an evidence-based case for enhancing regular migration pathways. Contrary to popular perception, most migration takes place between relatively wealthy countries, with migration pathways for people in less developed nations narrowing in recent years. This approach could backfire in the long term, as it risks deepening divides and exacerbating inequality when it comes to mobility, ultimately making it even harder for people from low development countries being able to migrate out of poverty. Efforts to overcome mobility inequalities, such through geographic free-movement arrangements and other regular pathways, are critical in facilitating safe, regular and orderly migration globally.



The full chapter is available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2024-chapter-4>.



The WMR interactive platform can be accessed at <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/>.

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