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THE WIDER WORLD

World on the Move

By Diane Chido
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I love to travel – especially to other countries. From an early age, I developed a passion for not just learning about but getting to see and experience firsthand cultures and customs different from my own.

As a student, I had the good fortune to visit places such Australia and the Soviet Union, along with Lithuania and Estonia. For work, I have had the opportunity to go to Belarus, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine with stopovers in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and England.

Regardless of the location – and no matter the purpose of traveling – many of us feel a great relief at returning home. But returning is not a reality for many of those who have left home, an estimated 281,000,000 people, or 3.6% of the world's population.^[i]

Some who migrate from their homelands do so by choice – for educational or employment opportunities or to unite, or reunite, with family, among other reasons. Others do so because they must – be it from lack of opportunity or political unrest or persecution.

Less than 4% might not seem significant, but it represents an increase from 2.6% in the 1960s. All the same, the United Nation's International Migration Organisation's [sic] (U.N. IMO) *2022 World Migration Report* states that, if able, most people prefer to remain in their homeland for various reasons – love

of their homeland, their families who live there, their communities, and economic and cultural security.

The U.S. is the top destination country with one-fifth of the world's migrants. This has resulted in 14% of our population being born elsewhere. Thus, it is a complex issue that deserves some unpacking.

From colonial times through the 19th century, with pauses during the American Revolution and the War of 1812, people willingly migrated to North America mainly from Northern Europe and France. With the Steerage Act of 1819, which demanded improved conditions on ships carrying immigrants, we also started keeping rudimentary demographic records of arrivals.

In the 1840s, there was an influx of Irish immigrants due to the famed potato famine and plans to work on building the railroads, as well as Chinese immigrants to the West Coast for railroad work, but also to flee from war and famine and to try their luck during the Gold Rush. These immigrant groups were met with less friendly welcomes than had their mainly Protestant Northern European predecessors, especially once the main railroad lines had been laid. In 1883 the Chinese Exclusion Act halted immigration by this group and by the 1920s more immigrants arrived from Southern Europe including Italy, the Balkans, and more Jews from across Europe. These demographic waves brought fears of employment scarcity and that the literal face of America would change from predominantly white protestants to others bringing various faiths, especially Catholic and Orthodox.

The Christian variants do not seem like a big deal today, but then the vestiges of prejudice stemming from 500 years of civil wars over dominant religions in Europe resurged. This led to the 1924 Immigration Act that placed quotas on immigration, limiting entry of members of each group to the same percent of the population that already existed in the U.S. Thus, there were already more English, German, Scandinavian, and Scottish Americans, so a greater percentage of migrants of these origins were permitted to enter.

By the 1960s, in conjunction with civil rights for Americans of African origin, there were calls for removing discriminating limits on immigration of Southern Europeans and Asians. The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 changed the formula to remove quotas and determine immigration eligibility based on whether one had close family already living in the United States or whether new immigrants possessed skills that were in short supply here. This opened the doors for a new wave of immigrants from the rest of the world.

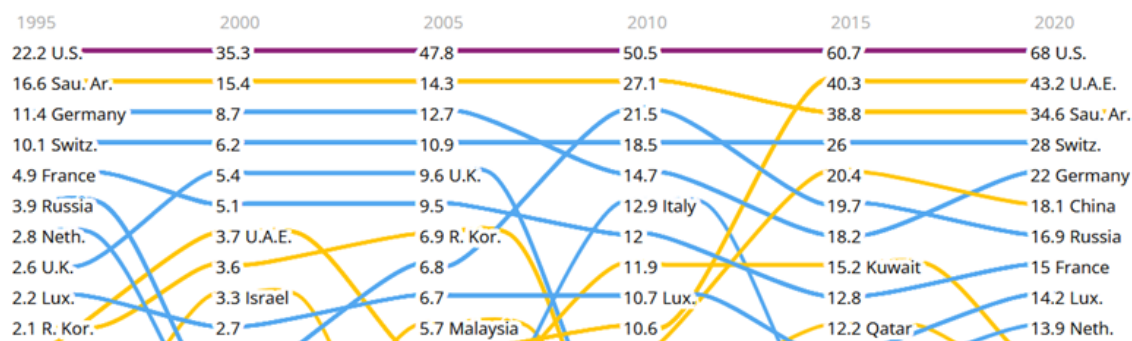
It is important to note that not all who depart willing never return home – and that remains true today. Some leave for short stays, even of a few years, to gain

credentials or make money with plans to go back home. Others make seasonal pilgrimages to other countries to work, like guest workers who come to the U.S. for each sowing or harvesting season, make money, and return home.

Some people living abroad send money back to their families called remittances. This is mainly why the seemingly anachronistic company Western Union still exists. Few people send telegrams, but millions send money home via this secure method.

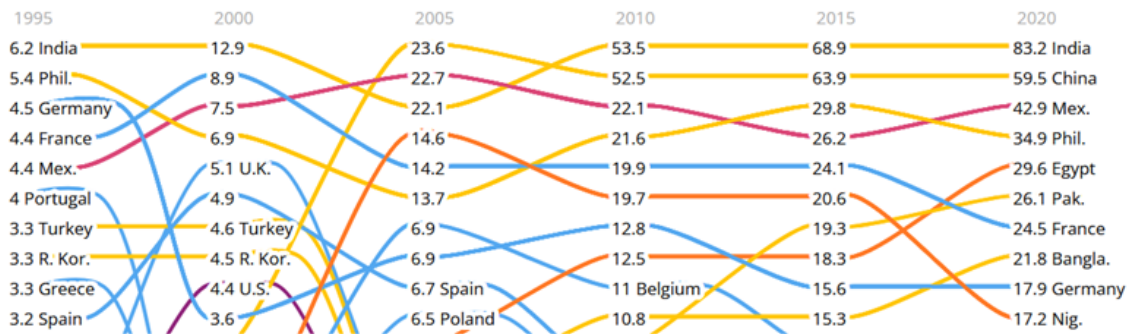
People from mainly Islamic communities around the world do not need Western Union, as they use a secure method called *hawala*.^[ii] Based on interpersonal trust, *hawala* relies on agents positioned around the world who serve as reliable “banks” without any tangible assets exchanging hands.

Generally, the source of these remittances are relatively wealthy countries with the U.S. consistently at the top of the list. Countries in Western Europe have also traditionally been top destinations for such workers. By 2020, the U.S. still topped the list, but the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) and Saudi Arabia held the spots at two and three, respectively, as shown in the figure.^[iii]



How the top 10 remittance sources have shifted since 1995.

The contribution of remittances to global gross domestic product (GDP) has exploded in the past two decades. The IOM estimated their total value to the world economy at \$126 billion in 2000 and \$702 billion in 2020, which is just over 3% of the 2020 U.S. total GDP. The countries to which they have flowed have also changed in that time as shown in the second figure from the same source.



Changes in remittance recipients since 1995

India is still the leader in receiving remittance funds, and the amount has increased nearly 14-fold from 1995 to 2020. China has become the number-two destination, and Mexico is now number three with the increase of migrant workers legally crossing the southern U.S. border.

In terms of the number of migrants who have moved to wealthier countries, either temporarily or permanently, the IOM report states that of the host regions with the most migrants, the majority were in Oceania (22%), North America (16%), and Europe (12%), as a proportion of the total respective regional population. Oceania is defined as Australasia (Australia, New Zealand, and some neighboring island nations), along with Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, all of which are Pacific islands in the Southern hemisphere.

When migration grabs headlines, it is often when people are fleeing poverty and violence at home. But people everywhere are on the move, and for various reasons – including emerging conditions, like climate change. Demographic experts anticipate that as climate change continues to raise ocean levels with glaciers melting, many of these islands will become uninhabitable, meaning these migrations will increase with intensity.

This is not the only form of climate migration that analysts with the Council on Foreign Relations and others investigate. While sea level changes are dramatic, non-oceanic flooding, heat waves, droughts, and wildfires also contribute to a changing Earth. The recent destruction of the town of Lahaina on the Hawai’ian island of Maui is one example here in the U.S. where hurricane-force winds exacerbated the devastating effects of a wildfire caused by extreme drought. Desertification and major lakes drying up across Africa are also causing people to migrate in large numbers. Anticipated rising pressure on fresh water sources – like our Great Lakes region – is also forecast to cause increasing migration globally.

Since 2008, even the traditionally conservative U.S. Defense community has been warning about the growing likelihood of humanitarian crises and conflicts arising over scarce water and agricultural resources. As recently as August 30, 2023, Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks warned in a discussion with West Point cadets that extreme weather events will place growing pressure on military readiness, stating that climate change considerations “must be – and [are] – a part of every strategic decision the department makes.” [iv] One pressure in particular is greater use of National Guard units to respond to dangerous environmental events here in the U.S.

Deputy Secretary Hicks discussed the problems of transportation, training, and critical infrastructure stressed by encroaching environmental changes noting, “You can't train for combined operations with allies and partners if the training facilities are flooded.” Hicks added, “You can't run an installation without water because you're in a drought, and you can't adequately prepare for future threats if you're occupied with urgent crises.”

The fact that world migration has more than doubled from 1995 to 2020 is not significant on its own. The entire global population has increased from 5.29 billion people in 1990 to 7.95 billion in 2020 as estimated by the World Bank, so it makes sense that there would also be more migrants as there are just more *people*. [v] The real concern, however, is the confluence of rising climate migration and current migration for reasons outlined above is a conclusion the U.S. Defense Department reached a decade and a half ago.

The U.S. has become a more multicultural country since the 1960s with increasing numbers of people claiming more than one ethnicity and more than one race in subsequent Census data. While we pride ourselves on being a nation of immigrants, the primary concern among voters is the issue of *illegal* immigration, with the number of undocumented people in the U.S. at an estimated 11 million. The problem of what to do about the people who may have settled here, had families, held jobs, paid taxes, educated their children as Americans, but live in the shadows, coupled with the latest surges at the Southern border clearly indicate that there is a problem with our immigration system.

This means that as a preferred destination country for migrants, the U.S. had better buckle up and begin to strategically prepare for a continued influx, rather than treating migration as a political hot potato to be avoided. The next installment in our series will discuss how we should be thinking about migration and what we need to ultimately do about it.

[i] “World Migration Report, 2022,” United Nations International Organisation for Migration available [here](#), accessed on September 13, 2023.

[ii] “What Is Hawala? Money Transfer Without Money Movement,” *Investopedia*, July 20, 2023 available [here](#), accessed on September 13, 2023.

[iii] Interactive map of remittance source changes since 1995 from “World Migration Report 2022,” United Nations International Organisation for Migration available here, accessed on September 13, 2023.

[iv] “Hicks Defines Need to Focus DOD on Climate Change Threats,” U.S. Department of Defense News, August 30, 2023 available [here](#), accessed on September 13, 2023.

[v] “Total Population,” World Bank Data, available [here](#), accessed on September 13, 2023.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diane Chido is an Erie native who spent her early career in Washington, D.C, returning to found DC Analytics, a research and analysis firm. She has taught Intelligence Studies at Mercyhurst University, Political Science at Gannon University, and Cultural Analysis at the US Army War College and has conducted research for numerous US defense agencies. She holds an MS in Applied Intelligence Analysis, an MA in Russian Language, and a BA in International Relations and Soviet Studies.



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