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## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (ECOSOC)

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### DESCRIPTION OF THE COMMITTEE

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) oversees the economic and social work undertaken within the UN system. Member countries debate economic and social issues, and many different UN organizations that address these issues report to ECOSOC.

Unlike the General Assembly, which includes all 192 member states, ECOSOC has only 54 members. Member states are elected by the General Assembly, and are selected to represent each region of the world. They serve three-year terms. Members create and vote on resolutions to address global concerns; each resolution requires a simple majority to pass.

### TOPIC: INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

#### INTRODUCTION

International migration is a complex issue; it touches on many other important national and international topics, including human rights, refugees, public education, healthcare, racial and gender discrimination, and the divide between developed and developing worlds.

**Migrants** are people who move from one place to another; **international migrants** are those who move from one country to another. People migrate for many reasons, but most often they do so to find work. In developing countries, rates of unemployment are very high and wages are very low. Leaving the country or region in search of work is one way people in developing countries can earn enough money to survive. People also migrate because they want to live in a country with better educational opportunities and a better standard of living. Some people are even forced to migrate, escaping conflict in their home countries. Sometimes, people are even kidnapped and transported across borders against their will.

Nations deal with international migration in different ways. Some countries provide migrants with healthcare and educational benefits. Other countries do not assign migrants the same basic rights they assign **citizens**. Often, migrants are unaware of the treatment they will receive in the countries they migrate to.

As the number of international migrants grows, the issue of international migration becomes increasingly critical. In 2000, there were 175 million international migrants in the world. By 2005, this number had increased to nearly 200 million.<sup>1</sup> As the population of international migrants continues to grow, the global community must address how to protect both migrants and countries from unfair national and international policies.

## **BACKGROUND**

Migration is not a new phenomenon. People have always moved from place to place in search of opportunities. But historically, migrants have not been protected by any international legal system. Even now, many migrants are not sufficiently protected by the countries they traveled to.

### *Refugees*

A large proportion of international migrants are **refugees**. Refugees have special legal status, and they receive different rights and protections from other migrants. Refugees are guaranteed the right to seek protection in other countries by the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which states “everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum [protection] from persecution.”<sup>2</sup>

Even so, refugees are often vulnerable to abuse and persecution in the countries they flee to. Like other migrants, refugees often do not speak local languages and are unfamiliar with local customs. But refugees are at special disadvantage—they may have to overcome emotional and physical injuries they experienced in conflict, and they are often unprepared for life in a new country.

Refugees comprise 23 percent of all international migrants in Asia, 22 percent in Africa and five percent in Europe. Every year, thousands of refugees are resettled outside their countries of origin. In 2007, 70,000 refugees will be resettled in the United States and 16,000 in Australia.<sup>3</sup>

### *Irregular Migrants*

Even for migrants who are not fleeing conflict, the process of migrating to another country can be very dangerous. All nations have laws that place restrictions on migration. To enter another country, migrants must take part in a complicated legal process, and even then they can be denied entry. Many do not speak the local languages, so they do not understand entry rules. People who migrate without following legal procedures are called **irregular migrants** or **illegal immigrants**.

There are millions of irregular migrants: an estimated 10 million irregular migrants live in the US and over 500,000 irregular migrants arrive in Europe every year.<sup>4</sup> 350,000 irregular migrants travel from Mexico to the United States every year.<sup>5</sup> These migrants cross borders illegally because they are seeking better lives for themselves and their families. But living and working as an irregular migrant is very dangerous. Irregular migrants are often not afforded the same rights and protections as legal migrants. They may not have the right to work or attend school, and they



can be arrested and forced to return to their country of origin. Irregular migrants can be easy targets for crime because they may fear they will be arrested if they contact the police for help.

### CRITICAL THINKING

*Migrants who cross borders illegally do so because they cannot find work in their own countries. But having thousands, or millions, of undocumented migrants enter a country be dangerous for both the irregular migrants and for the country. Can you think of what some of these dangers might be? How do you think authorities should deal with irregular migration? What benefits might migrants bring to their new countries?*

### *Human Trafficking*

Traveling over borders can also be hazardous. **Human trafficking**, the illegal transportation of people, is a growing industry. An estimated 600,000 to 800,000 people are trafficked every year.<sup>6</sup> Human traffickers, sometimes called “coyotes” or “snakeheads,” transport people across borders in unsafe ways. Every year, 2,000 people drown in the Mediterranean Sea when being illegally transported from Africa to Europe.<sup>7</sup> Even though it is extremely dangerous, many migrants are willing to pay snakeheads for transportation to developed countries. Sometimes, snakeheads even transport people who are unwilling to migrate, to force them into labor or sexual servitude.

### MOST IMPORTANT HOST COUNTRIES

The United States hosts 35 million migrants, 20 percent of the world’s migrants.  
The Russian Federation hosts 13.3 million migrants, 7.6 percent of the world’s migrants.  
Germany hosts 7.3 million migrants, 4.2 percent of the world’s migrants.

### MOST IMPORTANT ORIGIN COUNTRIES

35 million migrants are from China.  
20 million migrants are from India.  
7 million migrants are from the Philippines.

*Source:* “Migration at a Glance,” Global Commission on International Migration [www.gcim.org](http://www.gcim.org)

### *Legal Migrants*

Even international migrants who enter into countries legally are vulnerable. Because migrants may not understand local customs, laws or languages, they may be easily victimized by criminals. Sometimes, national policies do not even protect legal migrants from harassment or exploitation.

National policies may restrict migrants to certain locations and jobs. Many policies require employers to hire citizens over migrants. Even when they are hired, migrants may not receive the same benefits as citizens. Migrants may be forced to accept lower wages than citizens, even if



they perform the same work. They are sometimes forced to work in unsafe conditions, and may be prevented from joining labor unions.<sup>8</sup>

Many countries also do not provide health, education and or other services to migrants and their families. If these services are made available, migrants and their families may not benefit much. Children of migrants often have to study in a language they do not understand and adapt to customs they are unfamiliar with. Unless schools take special measures to accommodate the children of migrants, it is difficult for them to perform as well as the children of citizens.

### *Problems with Integration*

Once in a host country, it can be very difficult for migrants to **integrate**, or mix and adapt to the local people and culture. Regulations and attitudes in the host country can be unwelcoming. This is especially true when a large number of immigrants arrive in one community or region. This often provokes fear and discrimination—citizens of those host countries worry they will be overwhelmed by migrants. Because the majority of migrants come from developing countries, citizens may assume migrants are too uneducated to work at skilled jobs. They may think unskilled migrants will burden the welfare system.<sup>9</sup> They may also worry migrants will take available jobs away from them.

Sometimes, citizens are simply intolerant of change. International migration is dramatically changing the ethnic and cultural composition of many nations. This can bring about cultural diversity, but it can also result in cultural clashes.

#### **CRITICAL THINKING**

*Many people believe the government should not spend extra money to make special services available to migrants, such as bilingual election ballots or language-instruction classes for the children of migrants. These measures allow migrants to participate fully in a country, but they also cost taxpayers' money. Is it the government's responsibility to help migrants integrate? Or is it the migrants' responsibility to learn the local language? What if the migrant has little money or education?*

### *Inequality in the flow of migration*

Nations approach migration in very different ways. Some countries, especially developing ones, encourage their citizens to migrate to other nations.<sup>10</sup> Because migrants so often send money, called **remittances**, to family members in their countries of origin, migration can be an important source of income for developing countries. Remittances are the second largest source of external funding for developing countries—migrants send to their families an estimated \$300 billion dollars in remittances every year.<sup>11</sup>

Some governments, usually in developed countries, encourage migrants to immigrate to their countries.<sup>12</sup> Often, migrants are willing to work for less than citizens of developed countries, providing these developed nations with a relatively cheap source of labor.



However, both sending and receiving migrants can have negative effect for countries, too. One major concern of **sending countries** is **brain drain**. Brain drain is the loss of skilled men and women to other countries. Because many **receiving countries** prefer skilled migrants—people with technical skills and intellectual talents—they provide special incentives for skilled people to migrate. Skilled migrants earn more money than unskilled migrants, so they remit more money to their countries of origin. But this also deprives developing countries of much-needed doctors, scientists, professors and other skilled workers.<sup>13</sup>

Receiving countries often do not want unskilled migrants. Many people believe unskilled migrants will not find jobs that benefit society, and that they will occupy housing, schools and jobs that should be reserved for citizens.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Managing international migration*

Migration experts say the flow of migration is unbalanced and unfair. Since many receiving countries restrict the number of migrants they will accept, or refuse to accept unskilled migrants, poorer individuals often migrate illegally and subject themselves to dangerous situations.

In addition, migration experts complain about the management of refugee services. The international community spends a great deal of money on the few refugees who travel to developed countries. Even though most of the world's refugees escape to developing countries, they receive far less aid.

These experts want to create legal regulations to manage migration, protecting both migrants and countries. But because international migration occurs for so many reasons and affects so many nations, it is hard to create a system that accommodates every country and every migrant.

The international community must keep in mind that unequal wealth between nations causes much of the world's migration. In addition, managing international migration is difficult because each country regulates migration differently.

International migration can even be a source of conflict between countries. Countries' opinions of migration often change according to domestic and international events. In times of conflict or high unemployment, countries that usually welcome migrants may impose harsh restrictions on immigration. If sending countries depend on the remittances of irregular migrants, they may not prevent their citizens from illegally migrating to other countries.<sup>15</sup> This can cause tension between sending and receiving countries.

## WHERE ARE THE MIGRANTS?

| <u>Region</u> | <u>Number of migrants</u> | <u>Percentage of region's population</u> |
|---------------|---------------------------|--|
| Europe        | 56.1 million              | 7.7%                                     |
| Asia          | 49.9 million              | 1.4%                                     |
| North America | 40.8 million              | 12.9%                                    |
| Africa        | 16.3 million              | 2%                                       |
| Latin America | 5.9 million               | 1.1%                                     |
| Australia     | 5.8 million               | 18.7%                                    |

Source: "Migration at a Glance," Global Commission on International Migration, [www.gcim.org](http://www.gcim.org).

### PAST INTERNATIONAL ACTION

#### *Migration Research*

There are many issues that must be addressed to improve the fairness and efficiency of migration. At the UN Second Coordination Meeting on International Migration in 2003, experts announced that the causes and effects of international migration are poorly understood. They called for more research into the causes of international migration and better statistics on the flow of migration and its effects on migrants and nations.<sup>16</sup> The Global Commission on International Migration was also created in 2003 to study ways that governments and UN agencies can work together to address migration issues.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) also took a special interest in migration. OHCHR looks at international migration as an important human rights issue. OHCHR addresses the trafficking and transportation of millions of vulnerable people every year: what conditions migrants are transported in, the risks migrants face and the effects of large-scale migration on countries and regions.

#### *Awareness Campaigns*

OHCHR has established a Migration Task Force to promote the human rights of migrants. This task force has run human rights training sessions for immigration officials in East Timor, monitored the migration of workers from the Democratic Republic of Congo and other conflict-affected countries, and supported conventions on migration and human trafficking.<sup>17</sup>

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) sponsors campaigns in receiving countries to raise awareness of the ways migrants contribute to society and to teach migrants about local laws and customs. These campaigns help prevent discrimination against migrants and help migrants better integrate into their host countries. IOM's information campaigns also aim to teach migrants about the conditions and treatment they can expect in their host countries before they even arrive. This way, migrants can avoid irregular migration, learn about the rights they are entitled to, and be prepared for life in a new country. IOM also created the Geneva Migration Group, which brings together over 100 UN member states and major UN agencies to discuss formulating international migration policies.<sup>18</sup>



## Conventions

There have also been a number of documents produced which affect the treatment of migrants. *The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* and the *1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees* both protect the rights of refugees and compel countries to provide assistance to refugees in their borders. *The 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* and the *2000 Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air* helped countries combat human trafficking while providing protection for its victims.

Another important document for migrant workers was the 1990 *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families*. This convention prevents **arbitrary expulsion**, or the deportation of a migrant for no reason. It requires that all migrants and their families are treated with the same basic legal and human rights as citizens. The Convention entered into force in 2003, but as of October 2005, it had only 27 signatories and 34 parties. Secretary-General Kofi Annan reminded the international community that “only when it is ratified by a large number of countries, including those receiving significant numbers of immigrants, will we be able to say that the promise of the Convention is being translated into reality.”<sup>19</sup> Some of the most important receiving countries, including the United States, the Russian Federation, Germany and India, have not yet signed the Convention.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FORMULATING A RESOLUTION

Often, the causes for migration are not simply economic or political; delegates must think of migration as the interaction of both political and economic forces. In October 2005 the Global Commission on International Migration created a series of recommendations for migration management, including:

- Providing appropriate pay and working conditions for migrants;
- Cooperating to prevent irregular migration;
- Ensuring that all migrants’ human rights are protected;
- Promoting the integration of migrants; and
- Building consensus in the international community about the objectives of migration and the protection of human rights.<sup>20</sup>

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Does your country send many migrants? Does your country depend on remittances as an important source of income? How are your migrants treated in other countries? Does your country discourage irregular migration?
2. Does your country receive many migrants? Does your country depend on the services of migrants? How does your country treat migrants? Are these migrants regular or irregular?
3. How does your country protect the human rights of migrants? How does your country prevent human trafficking?
4. If your country is a sending country, what is its relationship with receiving countries? If your country is a receiving country, what is its relationship with sending countries?
5. Has your country committed to protecting the rights of international migrants in the *1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families*? Why or why not?



## TERMS AND CONCEPTS

**Migrants**: people who move from one place to another, permanently, semi-permanently or seasonally.

**International migrants**: migrants who move from one country to another.

**Citizen**: a person who lives in, or originates from, a country, and who is entitled certain legal privileges from that country.

**Refugee**: a person who “has fled his or her country and is unable or unwilling to return because of a “well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (from the *1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*).

**Irregular migrants/illegal immigrants**: a migrant who enters a country without following legal procedures, and without receiving official permission to enter.

**Human trafficking**: the illegal transportation of people, often against their will

**Integrate**: to mix in with and adapt to the local people and culture

**Remittances**: money sent to someone over a great distance, usually from someone working in a developed country to a family member in a developing country.

**Sending countries**: countries that migrants originate from.

**Brain drain**: the loss of skilled men and women to other countries.

**Receiving countries**: countries that host migrants.

**International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families**: a 1990 convention adopted by the Commission on Human Rights, which prevents arbitrary expulsion. It also requires that all migrants and their families are treated with the same basic legal and human rights as citizens.

**Arbitrary expulsion**: to expel from a country without reason or legal justification.

**Intra-regional migration**: migration within a region.



## SOURCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Global Commission on Migration [www.gcim.org](http://www.gcim.org)

Migration at a Glance [www.gcim.org/attachements/Migration%20at%20a%20glance.pdf](http://www.gcim.org/attachements/Migration%20at%20a%20glance.pdf)

*International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families* [www.unhchr.ch/html/menu6/2/fs24.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu6/2/fs24.htm)

Migration Task Force, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights,  
[www.ohchr.org/english/issues/migration/taskforce/](http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/migration/taskforce/)  
“Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean: A view from the ICFTU/ORIT”  
[www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/actrav/publ/129/19.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/actrav/publ/129/19.pdf)

## REFERENCES

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- <sup>2</sup> *UN Declaration on Human Rights*, Amnesty International, [www.amnesty.org/ailib/intcam/refugee/report/chapter2.htm](http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/intcam/refugee/report/chapter2.htm)
- <sup>3</sup> “Migration at a Glance”
- <sup>4</sup> “Migration at a Glance”
- <sup>5</sup> “Decapitating the snakeheads,” Economist.com, [http://www.economist.com/opinion.PrinterFriendly.cfm?story\\_id=4488653](http://www.economist.com/opinion.PrinterFriendly.cfm?story_id=4488653)
- <sup>6</sup> “Migration at a Glance”
- <sup>7</sup> “Decapitating the snakeheads”
- <sup>8</sup> “Factsheet No. 24, The Rights of Migrant Workers,” Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, [www.unhchr.ch/html/menu6/2/fs24.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu6/2/fs24.htm)
- <sup>9</sup> “Immigration in a globalizing world,” UN Department of Economics and Social Affairs, Population Division, [www.un.org/esa/population/publications/ittmigdev2005/ittmig2005.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/ittmigdev2005/ittmig2005.htm)
- <sup>10</sup> “Factsheet No. 24, The Rights of Migrant Workers”
- <sup>11</sup> “Migration at a Glance”
- <sup>12</sup> “Factsheet No. 24, The Rights of Migrant Workers”
- <sup>13</sup> “Immigration in a globalizing world”
- <sup>14</sup> “Managing Migration,” International Organization for Migration, [www.iom.int/en/what/cross\\_cutting\\_activities.shtml#policy](http://www.iom.int/en/what/cross_cutting_activities.shtml#policy)
- <sup>15</sup> Taylor, Russell, “Hardship at Home/Hardship Abroad, The Migration ‘System’ Doesn’t Work”
- <sup>16</sup> Executive Summary, Second Coordination Meeting on International Migration, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population division, [www.un.org/esa/population/publications/secoord2003/secoord.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/secoord2003/secoord.htm)
- <sup>17</sup> Migration, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, [www.ohchr.org/english/issues/migration/taskforce](http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/migration/taskforce)
- <sup>18</sup> “Managing Migration,” International Organization for Migration
- <sup>19</sup> Gilmore, Kristin, “Convention Establishes Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families,” United Nations Chronicle, Online Edition, Issue 2 [www.un.org/Pubs/chronicle/2003/webArticles/070203\\_migrantworkers.html](http://www.un.org/Pubs/chronicle/2003/webArticles/070203_migrantworkers.html)
- <sup>20</sup> “Migration in an Interconnected World: New Directions for Action” Global Commission on International Migration, [www.gcim.org](http://www.gcim.org)

