

**Contemporary Economic Migration: Impacts on Global Wealth, Demographics, and
Cultural Expression**

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Contemporary Economic Migration in Western Europe

Topic Description

Description & Thesis

As the subject of critical analysis in this paper, I seek to describe the causes and current trends of immigration to Western Europe after World War II and decolonization and its effects on Europeans and migrant communities in Europe. Western Europe has been a major destination for immigrants and refugees since the end of World War II, especially from former European colonies after decolonization (Alba & Foner, 2015, p. 1). Furthermore, this migration trend follows from social and economic pressures on a global scale, as recent advances in transportation and global communication provide an opportunity for migrants to find security and opportunity in Western Europe, among other regions (Steger, 2020, p. 11). This trend, however, is controversial among Europeans; some support immigration based on its economic and cultural benefits, while others suggest that it endangers both European identity and the economic development of the regions from which migrants arrive (Alba & Foner, 2015, p. 2). I will examine the causes and current trends of recent immigration to Western Europe and evaluate its impact on the identity, demographics, and cultural expression of the Western European population through the social science lens.

Population

A population significant to this topic is the Western European population as a whole, including both native Europeans and recent migrants. The Western European population is, overall, very prosperous in the global context; it has a high GDP per capita, a high quality of life, and a still slightly increasing population (Alba & Foner, 2015, p. 19). As such, populations from lower-income countries, especially former European colonies, have immigrated to Europe in

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recent decades to achieve a better livelihood and sense of security, and dwell primarily in urban centers (p. 2). Europe, like other developed regions, has also been facing an aging population, and this has been partially remediated in Western Europe through immigration (p. 23). The population is, therefore, currently navigating immigration's impact on its demographic structure and social cohesion.

Society's Impact

Global society impacts this topic through the advent of increased global communication, transportation, and an increasingly globalized economy. For instance, emigration at its current level is largely only possible due to recent advances in transportation and global communication, which are features of global society that allow for emigration at this scale (Steger, 2020, p. 11). Additionally, the economy now operates on a more global scale and provides a background for mutually beneficial economic arrangements between migrants and countries that receive migrants (Alba & Foner, 2015, p. 47-49). For instance, immigrant-receiving countries can benefit from the addition of new workers and skills to the national economy, while sending countries can benefit through emigrant remittances (OECD, 2008, p. 53). This illustrates that the larger society, through increasing global connectedness, has a demonstrable impact on this immigration topic.

Choice of Interdisciplinary Lens

I decided to use the social science lens to analyze this topic because I believe this lens provides the clearest and most relevant background to understand both the causes of immigration and its effects on the described population. For instance, Clemens (2022) provides evidence through analysis of economics and demographics of an "emigration lifecycle", where a country's

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emigration levels are connected to its level of economic development (p. 2). This can provide insight into how immigration has and will continue to evolve, as well as how it is experienced in the described population. Additionally, analyzing economic, demographic, and political factors may provide insight into how the topic impacts the population directly. Though I am eager to explore other lenses to analyze this topic, especially the natural and applied science lens, I believe that the social science lens best illustrates the causes and effects of immigration in Western Europe through the insight of economics and demographics.

Critical Analysis

Impact on Institutions

The social science lens can provide insight into how immigration to Western Europe impacts its economic and political institutions. Overall, the OECD (2008) notes that immigration's economic impact on a host country is generally positive in the long term (p. 53). A more specific example of immigration's economic impact is on state welfare programs; in the short term, immigrants may be more likely to depend on these programs, while in the long term, immigrants strengthen these programs by increasing the working-age population (Römer, 2022, p. 2). Political institutions are also impacted by immigration; questions about integration, assimilation, and admission of immigrants and refugees have become largely partisan issues in Europe, while immigrants themselves can change the political landscape by advocating specific causes (Alba & Foner, 2015, p. 2). The social sciences not only give us an understanding of the economic impacts of immigration, but also the public's views on the topic and its political reception.

Impact on Social Practices

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A point on globalization as a whole is that technology has impacted social practices through the advent of the internet and its influence on cultural expression through linguistic change. The internet has provided for faster and easier communication across global regions, which has allowed for cultural exchange on an unprecedented scale (Steger, 2020, p. 5). One effect of this is that the number of languages around the world is declining rapidly; some sources predict that 50-90 percent of languages will have disappeared by the end of the century (p. 94). This also means that local languages are often replaced or coexist with global lingua francas such as Chinese, Spanish, and especially English (p. 92-94). As such, social practices have been impacted by the globalization of communication and the subsequent change to cultural expression through language.

Potential Positive Change in Topic Discourse

This immigration topic can likely be better represented in public discourse by considering its economic benefits more diligently and by bringing greater awareness to socioeconomic issues which underpin immigration itself. For instance, immigration relates closely to economic conditions because there is a strong connection between a country's level of economic development and its level of emigration (Clemens, 2020, para. 3). Specifically, emigration is highest on average among middle-income countries, rather than the wealthiest or the poorest ones (para. 2). This fits into what economic historians have referred to as the "emigration lifecycle": Clemens (2020) observes that, as a country develops politically and economically, emigration initially rises, then tends to decline, and then eventually stabilizes (para. 3). This helps explain current global migration trends and illustrates the importance of promoting global development to reduce unequal and lopsided migration patterns. More generally, a look at the

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role of economic development yields important insight into why the phenomenon is currently happening and how it might change in the future.

Potential Obstacle

A potential obstacle that could interfere with the population's engagement with the topic is a lack of information and media coverage necessary for understanding factors that influence immigration. As previously mentioned, there are economic and social factors that impact immigration and can provide insight into how it will evolve in the future. However, media outlets are generally incentivized to cover recent trends and particular events, such as a refugee crisis or new immigration policy, rather than longer-term cause-and-effect relationships (Steger, 2020, p. 91). A lack of media coverage on connected global issues, therefore, could leave a person who engages with this immigration topic without a clear understanding of how immigration relates to long-term trends.

Important Factors

Some factors that impact this topic and its public perception relate to cultural conservatism, notably views on religious diversity and changing ethnography. For instance, many European conservatives express concern about immigration from Muslim-majority nations on the basis that the growth of Islam as a cultural and political force in Europe could represent a potential threat to Western culture and values (Alba & Foner, 2015, p. 2). Conservative groups also express concern about immigration's impact on ethnic and demographic change, as immigrants often bring change to the ethnic composition of a host country as well as its culture, language, and religion (Steger, 2020, p. 70-73). As such, not only is immigration itself under question, but also the degree of integration and assimilation of migrants into the dominant

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culture (Alba & Foner, 2015, p. 2). The concerns of cultural conservatism illustrate that there are divides on how to handle immigration on the basis of religion and culture; questions of multiculturalism versus assimilation are considered in the context of changing trends in global migration.

Benefits & Challenges

On a larger scale, there are both benefits and challenges to addressing globalization issues in that analyzing globalization can help inform the public on global trends more objectively and better guide decision-making, while a more difficult aspect comes from defining what exactly is a preferable outcome of globalization from a cultural perspective. As an example, analyzing global immigration can help us understand social and economic change, as it affects countries receiving immigrants by creating a younger population structure and thus a larger and more productive workforce, while it helps the economies of immigrants' home countries through remittances (OECD, 2008, p. 53). However, this comes with social consequences, too; various individuals argue for the benefits or challenges of immigration on European identity, which have been debated across communities and political institutions (Alba & Foner, 2015, p. 2). Economic and other quantitatively defined benefits, therefore, must also be weighed with social or cultural concerns.

Strategies for Personal & Professional Goals

The skills and techniques employed for engaging in critical analysis, such as defining a research question, gathering reliable information, asking the right questions, and exploring all perspectives can help address other globalization issues as well as personal and professional goals. For instance, scientific research in climate change requires that reliable data and

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information be sourced in order to draw accurate conclusions. Critical analysis strategies can also help in professional settings; in software engineering, for example, defining a problem correctly and asking the right questions can help tackle ambiguity in design problems and make ideas and tasks more actionable. Finally, a critical analysis strategy that can help in personal life is the practice of exploring different perspectives from one's own, in the form of political thought, culture, or other forms of expression, as this can promote curiosity and enrich one's current understanding of the world. Overall, strategies for critical analysis such as those outlined above employ broadly applicable skills that can promote high-quality and well-informed decisions in one's personal and professional life.

Reflection

Individual Framework of Perception

Critically analyzing this topic has led me to develop greater empathy and understanding of the human condition in the context of global migration. For instance, immigrants often fit the description of what the late sociologist Ulrich Beck referred to as *place-bigamists*, people who identify with more than one place due to their lived experiences across multiple regions (Steger, 2020, p. 89). These multi-regional identities often come together in urban centers, where immigrants tend to move, and can collectively change the identity and cultural expression of the place itself (Williams, 2014, p. 466-467). These factors affect my perception of individual experiences, on a local and global scale, by highlighting changes in identity that come with increased mobility. Global migration affects the human condition by providing new economic opportunities and cultural experiences at the possible expense of a less stable feeling of identity and physical belonging.

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Examination of Bias

Examining my bias has allowed me to become aware of my tendency to look for information that aligns with my worldview or understanding of a topic, rather than seek out information that challenges it. For instance, I initially believed that immigration had only negative economic impacts on immigrant-sending countries and exclusively gravitated towards sources that support this idea. Examination of bias through critical analysis and other means, however, made me understand the importance of incorporating varied perspectives in developing a well-rounded and nuanced understanding of a topic; it essentially slows down my thinking and requires me to rely on logic rather than instinct. These strategies have also helped me critically engage in news and media consumption and identify potential biases. Overall, an awareness of bias can change one's perception of the world by supporting logical thinking and cultivating a more accurate understanding of a topic for informed decision-making.

Field of Study & Profession

Critically analyzing diversity can positively influence the work of computational disciplines by ensuring that future advances in technology and automation are equitably distributed across society. Taking note of the varied experiences across different ethnic or socioeconomic groups, including access to the internet, affordability of cellphones or computers, or labor impacts of automation can help inform public policy and ensure that no group is left at a marked disadvantage with the development of technology. Automation is an especially relevant economic example that exemplifies a connection to globalization; this trend is estimated to result in a 20-30 percent fall in global merchandise trade by 2030 (Steger, 2020, p. 43). Gaining insight into how this trend impacts socioeconomic groups differently can help working professionals,

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multinational corporations, and governments plan ahead to ensure that no group is left behind in the global advancement of technology.

Perspective of Different Interdisciplinary Lens

Had I used the natural and applied science lens to analyze this topic, I likely would have emphasized global immigration's connection to climate change and Earth's natural resources. Climate change, for instance, is expected to impact the world's poorest communities in more immediate and profound ways (Williams, 2014, p. 475-476). Because immigrants often come from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, climate change could exacerbate current migration trends, increase the frequency and severity of future climate refugee crises, or otherwise disproportionately reduce the quality of life of immigrant communities. Society's connection to nature itself has been impacted as well: as Steger (2020) notes, capitalist consumerism can lead to a decline of traditional folkways and the commodification of nature (p. 90). Had I used the natural and applied science lens or another general education lens to analyze this topic, my analysis would have drawn from the perspective of a different branch of academic knowledge to uncover connections to globalization.

Interactions Between People of Different Viewpoint, Culture, & Perspective

Analyzing globalization can enrich the interactions between people with different viewpoints, cultures, or perspectives by promoting greater cultural awareness and global cooperation. For instance, globalization can impact a region through cultural homogenization as well as cultural diversification/hybridity (Steger, 2020, p. 85-89). Sociologist George Ritzer described the homogenization trend with the term *McDonaldization*, describing the processes where a large corporation's principles and values dominate an increasing share of American and

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global society (p. 85). Globalization, however, can also increase cultural diversity/hybridity; sociologist Roland Robertson argues that global cultural flows “often reinvigorate local cultural niches” (p. 88-89). Understanding cultural homogenization, often in the form of the increasing influence of multinational corporations, or cultural hybridization, in forms of expression like fashion, music, and language, can help contextualize one’s place in cross-cultural interactions. Furthermore, global cultural awareness can inform how globalization impacts different people across the world and promote global cooperation to tackle problems that affect the whole world, including climate change, food security, and international diplomacy (Chirico, 2014). Responding to globalization by promoting cultural awareness and collective response to global issues can ensure that the world’s diverse individuals, cultures, ethnicities, regions, and nations all live equally and synergistically in an increasingly global society.

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