

## **Migrant Workers Make More Passages of Hope**

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### **Body**

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As multinational companies continue moving their operations across borders in search of cheaper labor, record numbers of workers are moving in the opposite direction in search of better pay and higher standards of living, a new report on global migration patterns has found.

A review of recent census reports from 152 countries determined there are about 120 million migrants in the world now, including some refugees fleeing war or famine who don't return to their homelands. That number is up from 75 million in 1965 and is expected to grow, the report said.

The swell of migration is creating a new \$ 6 billion-a-year industry--human trafficking--as workers from poor countries pay brokers for false documents or to smuggle them into more desirable countries.

"Workers Without Frontiers: The Impact of Globalization on International Migration" was issued last week by the International Labor Organization, a United Nations agency based in Geneva. The biggest motivator for immigrants is a better economic life, author Peter Stalker found.

"In a world of winners and losers, the losers do not simply disappear, they seek somewhere else to go," the British economic researcher wrote.

Some foreign workers are needed because of tight labor markets in some countries, including the United States--which admits more immigrants than anyone else. In Europe and Japan, where birthrates are shrinking and the population is aging, tight immigration controls may eventually be loosened because immigrants will be needed as manual laborers, health-care aides and other jobs viewed as undesirable by local residents.

But the increase in immigration has stirred debate in many countries and sparked social and political unrest in others, including recent incidents in Spain that involved violent attacks on immigrants. Immigration is "controversial and complex everywhere," Stalker said in an interview.

Wide pay disparities among nations are giving workers an incentive to move, Stalker found. One 1996 study, for example, found that workers who earned \$ 31 a week in Mexico earned \$ 278 a week after they illegally immigrated to the United States. Indonesians who earned 28 cents per day in 1997 could earn \$ 2 or more per day in neighboring Malaysia. Manufacturing workers who earned 25 cents an hour in India in 1995 could earn 46 cents an hour in Thailand or \$ 14.40 in Australia, the report found.

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"We're shaking people loose from their environments," Stalker said. "It won't make them all migrate, but at least it's making them ask the question, 'Now we're on our own, what should we do?' "

One thing some are doing is paying to sneak into richer countries. It costs about \$ 500, for example, to arrange illegal boat passage from Morocco to Spain, according to the report, while passage from Eastern Europe to Western Europe can cost \$ 1,000 to \$ 5,000.

A sophisticated travel "package" that would include transportation and forged documents from China to the United States can cost \$ 30,000. Others risk their lives to make the trip. Some drown in the Mediterranean Sea trying to get to Europe, or off the coast of the United States trying to reach Florida.

Bangkok has become an international center for false-document production, according to the report. Passports, mainly Korean and Japanese, are doctored using sophisticated technology, and they cost about \$ 2,000 each.

Labor brokers also do a big business. The airport check-in lines at Dhaka, Bangladesh, are thronged by rows of workers wearing uniforms provided by brokers, preparing to fly to Malaysia and the Persian Gulf. The brokers charge the workers a fee for this service.

In the Philippines, workers reportedly paid up to \$ 4,600 to a broker for a job in Japan or \$ 3,800 for Taiwan, though legally the limit is about \$ 200. A Ukrainian worker who found a job in the Czech Republic reported he was required to pay half of his \$ 2.50-an-hour salary to his labor broker.

In some countries, migrants replace workers who have migrated elsewhere. In northern Thailand in 1996, for example, thousands of Burmese construction workers helped build a stadium to house the Asian Games, while Thai construction workers departed their homes in search of better-paying positions building expressways in Taiwan.

Between 3 million and 8 million people from Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Lesotho have moved to South Africa in search of work, the report said. Argentina has an estimated 200,000 undocumented workers from Peru, Bolivia and Paraguay.

Stalker said that increased worker migration is likely to continue for some time because it will take years before economic equilibrium is reached. Even when economically developing countries begin to prosper, Stalker said, their citizens continue to try to emigrate until they develop a sense of financial security in their home country. That's the reason that many South Koreans continued to seek to move abroad even as their economy grew stronger, he said.

Labor costs for manufacturing -- where many immigrants are employed -- are highest in European countries and lowest in Asia. China's costs have remained flat for many years.

Costs per hour

1980/1995 (latest available)

Germany \$ 12.33/\$ 31.88

Switzerland \$ 11.09/\$ 29.28

Norway \$ 11.59/\$ 24.38

Japan \$ 5.52/\$ 23.66

Sweden \$ 12.51/\$ 21.36

France \$ 8.94/\$ 19.34

U.S. \$ 9.87/\$ 17.20

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Canada \$ 8.67/\$ 16.03

Singapore \$ 1.49/\$ 7.28

Hong Kong \$ 1.51/\$ 4.82

Philippines \$ 0.53/\$ 0.71

India \$ 0.44/\$ 0.25

China \$ 0.25/\$ 0.25

SOURCES: Morgan Stanley, International Labor Organization

**Migrant Workers'** Impact

Percent of nations' labor force that is foreign:

Australia 25.0%

Canada 18.5%

Austria 10.0%

U.S. 9.4%

Germany 9.1%

France 6.2%

Britain 3.4%

Italy 3.4%

NOTE: Figures are for 1998

Sources of immigration to U.S.:

Legal

Mexico 18.4%

Philippines 6.2

China 5.2

Vietnam 4.8

India 4.8

Cuba 4.2

Dominican Republic 3.4

El Salvador 2.3

Undocumented

Mexico 54.0%

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El Salvador 5.6

Guatemala 3.3

Canada 2.4

Haiti 2.1

Philippines 1.9

Honduras 1.8

Poland 1.4

NOTE: Figures are for 1997 for legal; 1996 for undocumented

SOURCES: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, International Labor Organization

## Graphic

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Illustration, The Washington Post

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